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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes interviews with Washington state administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members at eight public high schools. Respondents identified several common themes regarding strategies to improve learning, the impact of state standardized tests, options and strategies for making learning more relevant, and challenges and opportunities for the future. They reported that changes were being made in curriculum to align with the Essential Academic Learning Requirements and ensure that students covered essential material in time for the 10th grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). Changes were also being made in instruction and assessment to prepare students for the WASL. Most participants expressed concerns about the WASL, though state standards had broad support. Remediation options for students having problems passing the WASL were being explored. Schools were experimenting with strategies to make learning more relevant, such as culminating projects and portfolios. The use of career pathways varied widely. Preparing students for the WASL and student remediation raised significant concerns. There were still some traditional assumptions about high school education (e.g., the best high school is one that provides a little something for everyone, and students deserve to relax during their senior year). (SM)

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Educational Opportunities in Washington's High Schools Under State Education Reform:

Case Studies of Eight Washington High Schools

VOLUME 3

Barbara McLain
and
Madeleine Thompson

September 2001

Washington State Institute for Public Policy

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WASHINGTON STATE INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY

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The Institute's mission is to carry out practical research, at legislative direction, on issues of importance to Washington State. The Institute conducts research activities using its own policy analysts, academic specialists from universities, and consultants. New activities grow out of requests from the Washington legislature and executive branch agencies, often directed through legislation. Institute staff work closely with legislators, as well as legislative, executive, and state agency staff to define and conduct research on appropriate state public policy topics.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The 2000 Washington State Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) to conduct a study on public high school programs in Washington:

> *The study shall examine what high school educational opportunities are currently available for students. Information shall be gathered on program attributes, student demographics, and outcomes for high school programs including, but not limited to, college credit (e.g., advanced placement and running start), tech prep, distance learning, and career pathways.*[1]

Volume 2 of the Institute's report, *Educational Opportunities in Washington's High Schools Under State Education Reform* analyzed responses to a statewide survey of public high schools and incorporated information from eight case studies of high schools across the state. This volume contains summaries of interviews with 18 administrators, 185 teachers and staff, 210 students, and 60 parents and community members at the eight case study schools.

Case Study Selection

Schools were selected based on the following criteria (see Table 1):

- **Size of School:** Two small schools (250 to 900 students), four medium schools (900 to 1,500 students), and two large schools (over 1,500 students);
- **Geography:** A balance of the west, central, and east sides of the state, as well as rural, suburban, and urban locations;
- **Demographics:** Schools with at least 15 percent of the student population eligible for free and reduced lunch and at least 9 percent minority enrollment;
- **Grade Levels:** Schools with a 9th through 12th grade configuration, to maintain consistency in the types of issues discussed; and
- **Other Considerations:** Several schools identified as pursuing standards-based reform efforts.

[1] Chapter 1, Laws of 2000 (EHB 2487 §607(4)).

Table 1
Case Study High Schools

High School (District)	Number of Students	School Size	Location	Percent Free and Reduced Lunch	Percent Minority
Pasco	2,285	Large	Central	43%	62%
Moses Lake	1,742	Large	East	26%	26%
Sunnyside	1,368	Med/Large	Central	39%	69%
Mark Morris (Longview)	1,147	Medium	Southwest	16%	9%
Nathan Hale (Seattle)	1,089	Medium	West	27%	39%
Sequim	935	Med/Small	West	18%	12%
Nooksack Valley	519	Small	Northwest	29%	17%
Lake Roosevelt (Grand Coulee Dam)	299	Small	East	25%	53%

Common Themes

Participants in the case studies were asked questions pertaining to the following topics:

- **Strategies to Improve Student Learning**

  Questions included the top priority for the school in improving student learning and changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment as a result of the state's education reform.

- **Impact of the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)**

  In addition to questions about how curriculum and assessment practices have been affected by the EALRs and WASL, participants were asked how schools are addressing students who may have difficulty meeting the state's standards. The opinions of students and parents were solicited about the WASL as a future high school graduation requirement.

- **Options and Strategies to Make Learning More Relevant for Students**

  Participants were asked about their high school's experience in using the following strategies to make learning more relevant for students:

  - *Career Pathways* where students are encouraged to explore educational and career options using a career theme.
  - *Culminating Projects* and *Portfolios* for students to display work and accomplishments to reflect their high school education and educational and career aspirations.
  - *Education Plan* to assist students with planning for their options after high school.
  - *Mentor Program* where teachers are assigned a small group of students to advise and mentor throughout their high school years.
  - *Service Learning* opportunities for students to combine community involvement with their studies.

- **Challenges and Opportunities for the Future**

  Despite the geographic and demographic variation among the eight high schools, a number of themes were remarkably similar among case study participants. Because the information comes from only eight schools, it does not represent all public high schools in Washington. However, the themes are generally consistent with the findings from the Institute's survey of public high schools. (See Table 2 and the summaries that follow.)

Table 2

Common Themes Identified in Case Studies

Topic	Theme
Strategies to Improve Student Learning	• Changes are being made in curriculum to align with the EALRs and ensure students cover essential material in time for the 10th grade WASL. • Changes are being made in instruction and assessment to prepare students for the WASL.
Impact of EALRs and WASL	• State standards have broad support, but most participants expressed concerns about the WASL. • Remediation options for students who will have difficulty passing the WASL are being explored, but few major changes have been implemented to date. • Because the WASL is not yet a requirement for graduation, there are few incentives for students to take the test seriously.
Options and Strategies to Make Learning More Relevant for Students	• Schools are experimenting with culminating projects and portfolios, but it takes resources, planning, and effort to integrate these activities into the curriculum and make them meaningful for students. • Career pathways can be valuable for students when career themes and post high-school planning are integrated into students' overall education. However, the use of career pathways varies widely and not everyone agrees high schools should emphasize career or educational planning outside the counseling office.
Challenges and Opportunities for the Future	• Preparing students for the WASL and remediation for students who have difficulty meeting the standards is a looming concern. • Some traditional assumptions about a high school education are still widely held: "The best high school is one that provides a little something for everyone," and "Students deserve to relax during their senior year."

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PASCO HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Pasco High School, located in eastern Washington in the Tri-Cities, is the second largest high school in the state and serves a large minority and at-risk population. It is the only comprehensive high school in a school district of over 8,800 students in grades K–12. However, there is an alternative high school with 125 students (New Horizons) that also serves the Kennewick School District. Pasco also operates an afternoon and evening school program for approximately 175 students. The Tri-Tech Vocational Skills Center and Columbia Basin Community College provide off-campus programs.

Pasco received a "Lighthouse School" grant of $150,000 for 1999 and 2000 from OSPI to showcase its work on developing educational pathways and performance-based assessment for all students.

STUDENT DATA	PASCO HIGH SCHOOL	STATEWIDE (GRADES 9–12)
FALL 2000 ENROLLMENT (HEADCOUNT)	2,285	310,403
PERCENT MINORITY	62%	23%
PERCENT FREE & REDUCED LUNCH	43%	31%*

*Grades K–12

For 2000–2001, Pasco High School had 125 certificated staff, 90 classified and support staff, and 8 administrators.

Strategies to Improve Student Learning

After passage of the state education reform law in 1993, administrators and staff at Pasco High School immediately began work on how to improve student learning. They focused on two state learning goals: Goal 1 (reading, writing, communication, and math) and Goal 4 (linking education to the world of work). The Goal 1 committee incorporated reading and writing across all subject areas, created an integrated curriculum for 9th grade, and developed a series of performance assessments. Funds from Student Learning Improvement Grants, School-to-Work, and academic-vocational integration were combined to provide stipends and release time for facilitators and workgroups to develop the projects.

Institute researchers visited Pasco High School on November 28 and 29, 2000. We were able to interview the principal, assistant principal, approximately 50 teachers and staff, 40 students, and 18 parents and community members at a specially-convened evening meeting. We also observed several classes. A special thank you goes to Principal Sheri Adkinson and Assistant Principal Gene Carlson for their efforts at arranging the visit and meetings.

Since 1997, all 9th graders have enrolled in ROUTE, a two-hour block class of science, computer literacy, and health. Planning and curriculum for the block is prepared collaboratively among the teachers of the three courses.

Another strategy to improve student learning is the use of performance assessment, in which all 9th grade students participate. In the fall, students and more than 100 community volunteers participate in "Search and Rescue," a simulated bus accident held in the sports stadium. Students exhibit their knowledge of first aid/CPR, orienteering, graph-reading, note-taking, and report writing. In the winter, every student participates in a job shadow and writes a report about his or her experience. In the spring, "Rocket to the Moon" combines learning about aerodynamics and rocketry, as well as nutrition and life in space, with a launching of student-built rockets in the stadium.

Administrator Perspectives

We decided right from the start that we were going to DO education reform, not sit back and plan for years. We already knew that whatever we were doing for students wasn't working well enough. We had been discussing integration of curriculum and the need to improve student engagement and achievement. This was an opportunity for us to be intentional about the changes we wanted to make.

From the beginning everything has been teacher-driven. Everyone has had to give up something—some cherished notion or idea, a popular unit. But in order for reform to be successful, you have to get buy-in. We also decided early on that this had to be for ALL students. Every student participates in the performance assessments—from special ed to ESL to honors. The objective is to have students work as part of a team and do hands-on activities to get them both engaged in school as well as actually applying their knowledge.

Teacher Perspectives

Integration requires a lot more communication and planning time. We didn't get any extra planning time. We had originally wanted to do more integration than just for the 9th graders, but we couldn't find a way to do it without significantly affecting workload. There are also scheduling and endorsement issues with teaching multiple subjects.

Student Perspectives

In a two-hour block, you get to know other students. You learn how to work well as a group and work in teams. It seemed quite well organized, and the projects seemed like good, practical stuff.

Parent Perspectives

There's a lot of integration going on—writing, doing multiple-tasks, involvement of different fields of expertise. The students get a chance to see how math, writing, and communicating all go together. That's the way the real world works. It forces a different way of teaching and assessing students. I like the idea that Pasco is being a leader in this area.

Impact of EALRs and WASL

Pasco's 10th grade WASL scores show gains in reading from 1999 to 2000 and a continuing challenge in mathematics. Many of Pasco's students have an ESL background.

In 1999, Pasco made a student's class-standing dependent on completed credits rather than accumulated seat-time. As a result, only students with enough credits to be considered sophomores take the WASL.

10th Grade WASL Results	Students Meeting Standard: Pasco High School		Students Meeting Standard: Statewide	
	1998–1999	1999–2000	1998–1999	1999–2000
Reading	33%	43%	51%	60%
Mathematics	20%	18%	33%	35%
Writing	28%	21%	41%	32%
Listening	49%	67%	73%	78%

Pasco has examined the curriculum, especially science, English, mathematics, and social studies, for alignment with the EALRs. Limited curriculum changes were made, such as moving U.S. History to 10th grade and requiring students to take integrated science in 9th and 10th grades to ensure coverage of content tested on the WASL. Instructional changes include increased emphasis on writing, including using prompts and scoring rubrics. The math department has incorporated more group work, math labs, and writing. Students spend part of math class on "WASL Wednesdays" working on sample problems.

Staff expressed strong concerns about how struggling students, particularly those with an ESL background, would be able to meet the state standards. Pasco offers a number of math, science, and social studies sections in Spanish. Students can then transition to Sheltered English Transitions (SET), where instruction is in English but with additional structure and a pace to support the student. Additional sections of applied math have been created, and Algebra I is now available as a two-year sequence to allow more time for students to master the concepts.

Administrator Perspectives

All along we have maintained that education reform is the law of the state, and it is up to us to meet that challenge. But I'm concerned about using the WASL as the primary indicator of student or school performance. It is a real disservice to ESL students.

Teacher Perspectives

We're spending less time on literature in English classes, but perhaps the time we spend is of better quality. For traditional math teachers, increasing the focus on writing has been a challenge, but otherwise our curriculum already covered the necessary content. Social studies is in limbo—we don't know what will be tested or when. Articulation across all grades is still lacking, but is starting, especially on WASL-tested subjects. We'd like to do more integration with academic and vocational, but there isn't time.

We've become more intentional about what we teach, and the EALRs serve as a good guide for curriculum. But we're pushing more difficult curriculum down into the lower grades—subjects and concepts that students may not be developmentally ready to understand and use. Why are we taking 12 years of school and pushing it into 10? Why aren't we expanding what we expect of 11th and 12th grade students and pushing them to excel?

We have serious attendance problems, and ESL is a huge issue for our school. There really isn't enough help for these students. Too many students come to us without basic skills. The big concern is that we will become a remedial high school with no room for electives because all the staff resources will be focused on students who didn't pass the WASL. We may be incredible teachers, but at the end of the day we're going to be judged on our test scores. Will our accomplishments be recognized?

Student Perspectives

Mostly the WASL was just long and boring. Nobody took it seriously because they knew it didn't count. There was a lot of writing, so I thought it was more fair than a "fill-in-the-dot" type of test. But what about students who do well in English but not in math, or vice-versa? Why should they be penalized for what they're not especially talented in? They should let students who don't speak English very well take the test in a different way.

It's a good idea to make students pass the test to graduate. It shows they learned something. There should be incentives to take the WASL seriously, like putting it on your transcript or having employers and colleges ask for verification that you passed. I disagree; I don't think it's fair that you wouldn't be able to graduate without passing the test. I don't do well on tests.

Parent Perspectives

I think the school is teaching to the WASL test, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. Teaching methods appear to be changing, the students' learning experiences are different, and there are earlier and higher expectations placed on students. I'm pleased with the pressure that education reform, including the test, brings to teaching and pushing both students and teachers to advance and learn more.

However, I have real questions about the validity of the test. I don't think it's possible to measure student performance in such a standardized manner. It's not a clear indication of students' abilities. We're not even sure it's being graded correctly. I also have concerns about accommodations for ESL and special ed students. Our population here in Pasco is tougher, and it's not fair to compare schools. It's also not fair to have the WASL be a high school graduation requirement. A student's entire future shouldn't be based on multiple choice and essays.

Options and Strategies to Make Learning More Relevant For Students

2000–2001 Implementation Stage	Experienced (3–4 years)	In Process (1–2 years)	Starting (First Year)	Actively Planning	No Definite Plans
Career Pathways	✓				
Culminating Project			✓		
Portfolios	✓				
Education Plan	✓				
Mentor Program			✓		
Service Learning	✓				

While the Goal 1 committee worked on creating ROUTE and performance assessments, the Goal 4 committee developed five career pathways to help students explore and prepare for their options after high school:

- BAMM: Business and Marketing Management
- EARTH: Environmental, Agricultural Resources Technology Horizons
- HANDS: Health and Services
- ACE: Arts, Communication and Entertainment
- EMIT: Engineering, Manufacturing Industrial Technologies

Since 1997, all 9th grade students are offered five two-week course modules that orient them to the five pathways. The modules include guest speakers, information about possible careers, field trips, and instruction geared around that pathway. For example, the EARTH module (taught in the science class) included speakers from Hanford and other local industries, a trip to a water treatment plant, and laboratory work on water purification. In the spring, students choose one of the pathways. Students receive extensive information about possible careers and guidance for selecting courses and electives that pertain to their pathway. Although they are free to change pathways at any time, most do not.

In addition, there is a special project for each grade level, which students are encouraged to focus around their pathway:

- 10th grade students complete eight hours of service learning, including a civics unit presented in U.S. History, work with community mentors, and written reflection and classroom presentation of their experiences.
- 11th graders participate in "Enterprise Business Week," where all students spend a week at the local community college running a mock business in teams with other students and volunteers from the business community.
- Effective for the 2001 graduating class (the first class to complete each of the grade-level projects), seniors must complete a senior project that includes a research paper, a product, and a presentation to the community in the spring.

Parents are encouraged to be involved in the pathway model through informational meetings held for each project, volunteer opportunities, and communication in the school newsletter. Parents sign off on the student's pathway choice, portfolio, and education/career plan.

Each student keeps a Personal Career Planning Portfolio throughout high school containing such items as a personal mission statement, career interest inventories, papers for the various special projects, and samples of their best work. Included in the portfolio is a six-year education/career plan that students use with their advisor when scheduling classes.

Finally, starting in 2000, Pasco implemented an advisory program where each teacher is assigned a group of students to follow throughout their high school career. Advisory classes meet every two weeks and supplement services available from counselors.

Administrator Perspectives

After the work on curriculum integration in 9th grade, we realized we couldn't fully fold the pathways model into the integrated subjects at the same time. It would have been too much. We still hear comments that the pathways modules take too much time away from the regular curriculum, but we simply remind people that the modules focus on the EALRs, too, and at most they're giving up one unit.

One of the key features to our pathways and projects is that absolutely everyone is involved: every teacher, every student. If you're not teaching ROUTE, you're doing a pathways module or grading senior projects or advising on service learning. Special ed, ESL, Running Start, and evening program students are expected to complete the projects. It can be a challenge, but all students means ALL students.

Teacher Perspectives

I've never seen anything like what this school is doing with pathways. A lot of schools talk about it, but there's no evidence of a real commitment to the pathways concept. We're trying to emphasize high standards and push the kids academically as well as practically. Students might not know what career they want, but hopefully they know what their strengths and weaknesses are, what their interests might be, and what opportunities they have to explore. You don't hear very many "I don't knows" from juniors or seniors when you ask them what they might want to do after high school.

We've had to move some curriculum around or put it aside for the pathways, but the kids really seem to benefit. More experience will allow us to improve our integration of all the various activities into the curriculum without taking away necessary content. But the frustration comes because we're not able to "do it all" within the day or the school year. Teachers are becoming overwhelmed, not so much by change itself, but by its pace and the fact that it never seems to stop.

The advisory is really very positive—it gives you time to get to know your kids, work with them on that year's project, encourage them to explore their options. But it has created another class of students teachers are responsible for on top of everything else.

Student Perspectives

The big focus of our school seems to be to encourage us to understand what we're learning and how to apply what we're learning in real life. Some people think the emphasis is too vocational—picking pathways, thinking about careers. The pathways don't necessarily fit what I want to do, but the projects have been pretty helpful in thinking about what I'm interested in. I got the chance to explore a lot of different options and changed my mind about professions I might want to pursue.

After I picked my pathway, it didn't really matter which one I was in. It doesn't have any bearing on which classes I'm taking. The teachers try to frame their advice to you about projects and the classes you take based on your pathway, but sometimes it feels like they're trying to put you in a box. If what you want to do doesn't fit the pathways exactly, then the projects seem artificial. Some teachers will ask and help you with things related to your pathway; others don't want to change the way they have always taught their classes.

Parent Perspectives

I was worried about the effect these projects and pathways would have on academics, but I don't have that worry anymore. Children have a lot of different interests, and they need to know they have lots of options. The school has gone out of its way to help students learn about careers. At least pathways encourages them to explore instead of just floating along and earning credits to graduate with no particular purpose. I feel very proud when my kids have in their head what they want to do. Part of their duty as children is to thirst for knowledge, and I feel the school gives them that opportunity. I see them being excited about learning.

I think the pathways force kids to choose too early. They're too young to make these kinds of decisions. They're under the impression that they have to pick a single pathway and that it could affect their entire career. I don't think students (or parents) perceive that they can switch or deviate from their pathway.

There was a big discussion in the community about the senior project. It's not fair to have this year's seniors have to complete it. There isn't any incentive for students to do well because it's not included in their grade point. It's just busywork. But on the other hand, it's a ten-page paper. Students should have learned that much by the time they're seniors. This is all about preparing kids for the real world. There's enough flexibility to fit each student's interests.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Future

The staff at Pasco High School have designed and implemented a new activity or project every year for the past four years. They describe themselves as encouraged by the results but worried about the time and level of effort these activities take. They are committed to helping all students achieve at higher levels but are concerned, along with parents, about their population of at-risk students and the large size of the high school. Some students continue to display a lack of motivation during their senior year. It remains to be seen whether this will change with future classes as the projects become standard expectations.

Administrator Perspectives

We've had tremendous support to try to accomplish the integration and pathways. But the teachers are also under pressure from the more academic aspects of education reform. We need to look objectively at all of the things that are expected of teachers. Is it reasonable to expect them to do it all? Where is the support from the state for this work?

Teacher Perspectives

Time is our biggest enemy. We've been going awfully fast with adding new things. All of these activities are positive—everybody here believes that. But we need to stop and take stock of what we're doing. Do we know what the impact has been? Class size is a big issue, too. We're up to 32 or more students for a lot of classes. If any high school needs to reduce class size, it's this one. Look at our population!

Student Perspectives

They need to be more organized around all these projects and activities. They also need to offer more classes directly in the pathway, directly related to a career. They shouldn't expect us to do so much. This year's senior class was the first that had to meet all these requirements. We should be able to relax in our last year. Senior year is supposed to be fun.

Parent Perspectives

Too much time is being spent on testing. The state needs to figure out how to accommodate ESL and special education students and consider the background environment of the students. My biggest concern is that the high school is too big. If students are struggling, they are not going to get the individualized attention they need.

Pasco offers a breadth of opportunities to learn, but you can't force feed them to students. Part of the maturing process that takes place is to assume more responsibility. If they fail or don't participate, it's not for lack of opportunity.

MOSES LAKE HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Moses Lake High School is located in a medium-sized town in Eastern Washington. It is the only comprehensive high school for a district of 6,600 students. The Columbia Basin Alternative High School serves approximately 130 students. Big Bend Community College is located in Moses Lake, and starting in 2000, students can take advantage of programs at the North Central Washington Satellite Skills Center. Moses Lake High School only recently (1997) added 9th graders, creating a 25 percent increase in the size of the school population. In the early years of education reform during the 1990s, Moses Lake School District was one of the first to receive a Schools for the 21st Century grant.

Student Data	Moses Lake High School	Statewide (Grades 9–12)
Fall 2000 Enrollment (Headcount)	1,742	310,403
Percent Minority	26%	23%
Percent Free & Reduced Lunch	26%	31%*

*Grades K–12

Moses Lake High School has 85 certificated staff, 56 classified and support staff, and six administrators. The principal is new to the high school in 2000–2001, having previously been principal of a district middle school.

Strategies to Improve Student Learning

Moses Lake was one of the state's first high schools to experiment with a block schedule and has operated on a four-period block since 1993. According to staff and students, this schedule has both pros and cons. Students have more time to learn material, more opportunity to interact with teachers, and less homework. However, for various reasons, block schedules can be difficult for such classes as math, music, and Advanced Placement. Some believe students' choices of electives are reduced; others like the opportunity to change courses every semester.

Last year, Moses Lake adopted new curriculum and textbooks in science and math and had the opportunity to examine these subjects closely for alignment with the state's learning goals. All freshmen are now expected to take physical science in order to cover the content in the science EALRs. The new math curriculum is more rigorous than before: Moses Lake eliminated honors classes in geometry and algebra because the same content is now

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Institute researchers and staff from the Senate Education Committee visited Moses Lake High School on December 5 and 6, 2000. We were able to interview the principal, 5 administrators, approximately 29 teachers and staff, and 35 students. We also observed a number of classes. Thank you to Principal David Balcom for coordinating our visit.

covered in the regular classes. All students are required to pass a math proficiency test in order to graduate.

Administrator Perspectives

For student management purposes and also from an extended learning standpoint, the block works quite well. There are fewer disruptions and transitions during the day. Students focus better.

Because of the new curriculum adoptions, science and math teachers have been doing the most critical examination of alignment with the EALRs. We've actually found these areas are reasonably well aligned, particularly with the changes we've made.

Teacher Perspectives

The block provides more flexibility and in-depth coverage of content. Concepts come across better. There's a lot of talent among the staff outside of the specific subjects they teach and the opportunity to cross-teach is better with the longer class period. However, I'd like to see instruction in the block delivered differently. We're not doing integration across subjects—I'd like to see us try that. Electives can be a problem, and there's real competition for upper division classes. AP and language courses can't cover as much material in a semester. There's no continuity in math, and you can't really run year-long classes like band or yearbook. It's asking a lot for kids to use up their limited number of electives on those subjects year after year.

Anybody who has adopted curriculums or text has had to look at their curriculum for alignment. It's better to cover all the introductory things in freshmen and sophomore years. We're having to decide what to leave out and cram learning into a smaller time frame. If the curriculum is changed to be totally WASL-focused, what's left to interest kids?

Student Perspectives

How well the block works depends on the class and the teacher. Sometimes in-class reading fills up the time or you do your homework. You get more chance to work on projects and discuss things with the teacher. You don't burn out on one class going the whole year. It's hard to fit in music. Math is pretty slow and boring for 90 minutes. I feel like I'm not getting the content I need for college in my foreign language class.

Impact of EALRs and WASL

Like many schools, Moses Lake saw a greater increase in its reading scores on the 10th grade WASL than in mathematics. Staff are particularly concerned about the drop in students' writing scores. An effort is underway to have students write using prompts and grading rubrics. The first in-service training this year was dedicated to teaching and assessing writing.

10th Grade WASL Results	Students Meeting Standard: Moses Lake High School		Students Meeting Standard: Statewide	
	1998–1999	1999–2000	1998–1999	1999–2000
Reading	46%	57%	51%	60%
Mathematics	27%	28%	33%	35%
Writing	36%	26%	41%	32%
Listening	72%	78%	73%	78%

The school district has established learning expectations for each grade level for kindergarten through 8th grade. The high school will begin working on this task next year.

Staff are concerned about motivating students to take the WASL seriously and what may happen to students who fail the test. In the last two years, Moses Lake has been examining the test scores of incoming students and placing them in appropriate reading classes. A new "Key Ideas" class was created to integrate science and social studies at a remedial level for students having difficulty, and summer school was offered for the first time last year. Staff would like to explore additional alternative learning opportunities similar to the self-paced curriculum offered at the alternative high school and have these available at the regular high school.

Administrator Perspectives

Staff are beginning to feel pressure from the EALRs and WASL. It's changing the focus of our attention. I don't think it has hit yet that everybody is responsible for the WASL—not just grades 7 and 10. I believe in standards, exit competencies, standards for graduation—everybody does.

We've talked to students, and we know they don't take the tests seriously because they don't count. If you have a junior or senior who hasn't passed the WASL, what do you do? We'd like to get an alternative learning program into this school. We lose too many students to dropouts already. We've made some changes, like "Key Ideas" and summer school, but it's still not enough.

Teacher Perspectives

Raising the bar on the EALRs is good. The EALRS are wonderful because they put us all on the same page at the same time with what's important for students to know. Reading and writing are really "it" right now. We're starting to have more focused staff development, but we need to find training opportunities that apply to all staff. Focus and priority seem to vary by department. Concern about the WASL shouldn't be misinterpreted as opposition to change or opposition to accountability. We just don't want to see schools compared to each other.

We need to work on earlier remediation and not wait until the fall of a student's junior year when the WASL scores come out. What kind of schedule are we going to end up with? How do you reconfigure staffing dramatically when the funding doesn't change? These questions just don't seem to have any answers, and I'm afraid the end result is just an increase in school dropouts.

Student Perspectives

I thought the WASL was a big waste of time. We knew it wasn't going to affect us in any way. They told us it was a chance to see what we could do. Regardless of what you do to convince kids, half will try hard and half won't. I think it's good to have to pass the WASL to graduate—it proves you know something. You don't deserve a diploma if you don't have basic skills.

Options and Strategies to Make Learning More Relevant For Students

A self-study for accreditation completed in 1999 suggested that Moses Lake needed to increase student motivation and attendance, create opportunities to connect student learning to their everyday lives, and create a comprehensive learning improvement plan. Staff are beginning to talk about strategies for accomplishing these objectives, including senior projects, portfolios, or career pathways.

2000–2001 Implementation Stage	Experienced (3–4 years)	In Process (1–2 years)	Starting (First Year)	Actively Planning	No Definite Plans
Career Pathways					✓
Culminating Project					✓
Portfolios					✓
Education Plan	✓				
Mentor Program	✓				
Service Learning		✓			

Although some individual teachers or counselors have experimented with portfolios or pathways, these have not been implemented school-wide. It is district policy that students complete an education plan, signed by their parents, but there is no evidence students actively use this tool for planning their transition after high school. Eight hours of community service is required as part of the Senior Civics class.

One opportunity to add a culminating project is through the advisory period. For more than five years, Moses Lake has assigned each student to a teacher who advises 15 to 20 students for the duration of their high school education. The advisory meets every other week, and a committee of teachers provides a common lesson plan. The groups work on learning styles, career surveys, and education planning. Staff and students agree the time could be better utilized and suggest that a culminating project could provide a focus for the advisory period. However, they are also concerned about the amount of planning and oversight such an effort would require.

Moses Lake recently expanded learning opportunities such as Advanced Placement and technology certification through A+ and Cisco. The new skills center satellite will offer students advanced automotive, cosmetology, TV/video production, and bilingual interpreter programs in addition to the vocational offerings at the high school.

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Administrator Perspectives

We started advisory when we moved to a block schedule because parents were concerned about the lack of opportunity for students to interact with a lot of different teachers. But now the novelty has worn off, and teachers are asking what they should do with that time. We need to be more bullish with our time—to use it differently and to more effect.

I see an opportunity to incorporate senior project into advisory time. We've been scoping out how other schools use portfolios, but we haven't yet started the discussion of how we might do that. It's sometimes hard to convince teachers that these activities are relevant. They fear they'll have to manage something additional on top of teaching their regular classes.

We've added more honors and AP classes to our schedule, but students are concerned about protecting their GPA so they tend not to enroll. For the middle group of students, the hook is vocational programs and the skills center. Some of these kids are wandering, and they don't see a lot in the school that's for them.

Teacher Perspectives

In theory, advisory is a great idea. But the kids think it's a joke—they don't get any meaningful information out of it. Once they figure out they don't have to go, they skip class. They need to feel like it's worth something. The program needs to be tweaked again. I think guidance is the counselor's job. It takes teachers away from what they're trained to do: teach.

We don't have structured portfolios, senior projects, or pathways. I think senior project would be a great opportunity for students to show skills and knowledge more than just a test. It adds value and relevance and gets staff and community more involved with the students. We also need to incorporate a student's plans for after high school. We need a better way of helping kids through that transition. We should be working more on project-based learning and integration.

How do you do plans, projects, and pathways when the EALRs and WASL come first? In theory it's a good idea, but once it becomes a requirement, then who's going to oversee it? The real problem is time. It would be a lot of work to keep teachers in agreement on the goals of the project, not to mention the administrative details.

Student Perspectives

The only senior requirement right now is community service. If they're going to require a project, it should be part of a class. Advisory is a waste of time. There's supposed to be something planned out, but some teachers don't do it or spend only a small amount of time on it. I think they're trying to get you to connect with somebody.

They're working to make stuff for college-bound students better. There's no incentive to take honors classes because it hurts your GPA. I think there are lots of opportunities for other students who may not be going to college, but I would like it if the school focused more on career options.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Future

Staff and students believe there are adequate opportunities for college-bound students but acknowledge that additional strategies are needed for students who do not complete a four-year degree. Although staff frequently report problems with student motivation, some students say they would like to be challenged more academically.

Administrator Perspectives

We know we need to expand offerings for juniors and seniors. I think projects would help to engage students and help them explore their interests.

Teacher Perspectives

Motivation of students is a huge issue here. Motivation to learn really starts in kindergarten. One of our central purposes as educators is to give students a picture of possible success, to show the light of possibility. We just need to keep trying and have them see that somebody cares. There are lots of opportunities for students to learn—there's no reason anyone should feel ignored.

Student Perspectives

Motivation is really the students' issue—it's not fair to place blame on the teachers. It's really up to the kids to make choices to participate. If you skip class, there aren't any consequences. You end up learning the same things every year. They seem to be strict on things that don't matter. There's something for everyone, and teachers go out of their way to help students, but we need to work on attitude, to take things more seriously. They need to raise the standards.

SUNNYSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Sunnyside High School is located in the second largest community in the Yakima valley, and it is the only comprehensive high school for a district of 5,400 students. An alternative high school, P.R.I.D.E., serves approximately 95 students. Sunnyside serves a diverse student population with a high turnover, many of whom are considered at risk of dropping out of school. Students interested in Running Start can attend the Grandview campus of Yakima Valley Community College, about ten miles away. Relatively few students attend the Skills Center program located in Yakima, about 30 miles away.

STUDENT DATA	SUNNYSIDE HIGH SCHOOL	STATEWIDE (GRADES 9–12)
FALL 2000 ENROLLMENT (HEADCOUNT)	1,368	310,403
PERCENT MINORITY	69%	23%
PERCENT FREE & REDUCED LUNCH	39%	31%*

*Grades K–12

For 2000–2001, Sunnyside High School had 68 certificated staff, 27 classified and support staff, and 5 administrators. The principal will be retiring at the end of the school year, and the middle school principal has been appointed to the position.

Strategies to Improve Student Learning

Sunnyside has used a four-period block schedule for six years. Staff and students generally like the opportunities for more in-depth learning but also acknowledge that a 90-minute period challenges teachers to adapt their teaching style and classroom activities. Changes in curriculum are occurring gradually, department by department. The English department is widely acknowledged to be leading most of the changes, due in part to the school's emphasis on improving reading and writing at all grade levels.

Starting in 2000, freshmen who come in with low WASL scores are placed in a full year of English and math (rather than a one semester block of each). The math department is hoping to adopt new textbooks next year that will fit better with the block schedule. The science department is considering requiring all students to enroll in integrated science in order to cover the broad range of science EALRs.

Institute researchers and staff from the Senate Education Committee visited Sunnyside High School on November 13 and 14, 2000. We interviewed three assistant principals, approximately 14 teachers and staff, 20 students, and 3 parents. Thank you to Adelia Goedhart, Juanita Hernandez, and Jan Schuette, who helped facilitate our visit.

Administrator Perspectives

The block schedule allows students to get to know their teachers, and they can do a variety of different activities rather than just listen to lectures. We have really noticed a change in attitude in the kids. It's probably hardest on the teachers to adapt their teaching repertoires, and they still need to work on that. The block forces innovation, which is good.

We've spent the last three or four years thinking about how to adapt the curriculum. It's a positive effort, but frustratingly slow. Different departments are at different stages. The English department has a 100 percent grasp of what it will take to get kids to the reading and writing standards. Other departments will come along over time.

Teacher Perspectives

The block schedule allows for more in-depth study. That especially helps the kids who are having trouble. But there's still very little integration across subjects. Math and science are particularly challenging for a block schedule. Teachers can cover a lot and build in time for review, but the kids fool around when they have too much time. Whether or not it's better for student learning depends on how much the teachers have adapted their instructional style.

We revised the scope and sequence of English classes and are encouraging all teachers to use more writing. We provided a manual on how to grade writing assignments so teachers could brush up on their English skills. Personally, I am trying to add more projects, scenarios, and applications to how I teach, but nothing much has changed in the curriculum per se. Integrated science can be a hard sell to parents. They think "their" student is above general science. But there's no other way to provide the content for the WASL if students are separated into biology, chemistry, or physics in the first half of high school.

Student Perspectives

I like the block schedule. You get enough time to do your homework during the day and teachers explain more and help out more. I think teachers are required to be more educated under a block schedule. It's not as easy for them to just read out of the book. But some of the teachers don't use the time well. I'd like to take more electives, but can't fit them into my schedule.

Parent Perspectives

Teachers could really do more to adapt their teaching strategies to different learning styles. I know of a few that do, but they all could do better with that.

Impact of EALRs and WASL

Most teachers agree the EALRs provide a solid framework for curriculum and instruction, but they are concerned about the possibility the EALRs will continue to change or be eliminated in the future, causing additional disruption in the curriculum. The English department has created a lesson plan template that includes the EALRs, reinforcing the need for teachers to ensure their lessons are aligned. A few individuals in other departments have made similar efforts.

In-service training is focused on the EALRs and WASL, with a heavy emphasis on reading and writing. Sunnyside's WASL scores may reflect this additional attention: reading scores

increased significantly between 1999 and 2000. The gains in math were much smaller. At the superintendent's suggestion, in-service for the current school year was shifted from a series of half days to seven full days in order to make better use of the time.

10th Grade WASL Results	Students Meeting Standard: Sunnyside High School		Students Meeting Standard: Statewide	
	1998–1999	1999–2000	1998–1999	1999–2000
Reading	38%	49%	51%	60%
Mathematics	15%	16%	33%	35%
Writing	26%	22%	41%	32%
Listening	55%	68%	73%	78%

Staff, students, and parents expressed concern about the effects that requiring the WASL for graduation could have on at-risk students, the dropout rate, and ESL students. Sunnyside has doubled the number of students enrolled in a math fundamentals class and plans to keep track of student performance and test scores from year to year to ensure that individual students are progressing.

Extra tutoring is available on a drop-in basis at noon, after school, and in the evenings. The high school previously had a credit retrieval program but is eliminating it because faculty believe students might be intentionally failing courses in order to earn the credit simply by taking a test without attending class or doing homework. Staff are anxious about how large numbers of students needing remediation may affect the curriculum and their opportunity to continue to offer an array of elective and advanced classes.

Administrator Perspectives

As a school, we've been focusing on reading and writing first. Teachers know the state expects them to focus on and meet the standards. The majority of teachers are glad to see the standards raised. The biggest hurdle is changing students' attitudes so they believe they CAN meet these standards. We don't want to just teach to the test, and we don't think that's happening. Standards have had a positive impact on the teachers in different departments working together across the curriculum.

The district is providing opportunities and resources for planning time to address education reform. Teachers actually get tired of all the in-service—they want more training, but they want to impact their classroom performance directly, not just hear another speaker.

We haven't really formally addressed what to do if students don't meet the standards. This is the first year we have actively tried to identify low-performing students as they enter the high school. We're going to have a lot of kids who don't meet the standards, no matter what anyone says. What will happen if kids don't pass? We'll turn into nothing but a big remedial high school.

Teacher Perspectives

The faculty seem pretty positive about the EALRs. The EALRs provide clear goals, and it's nice to be able to compare them to the teaching content to make sure we're on the right track. I'm glad the state didn't extend the EALRs beyond "what" to teach and into "how." That's still left up to us. The state needs to know that changes in the EALRs have a huge ripple effect as we try to adopt curriculum and prepare lessons. They keep changing them.

It's working well to focus on reading and writing, no matter which subject is being taught. There is a lot of discussion among staff about what to do, and everyone feels reading is the key. Every in-service seems to focus on the EALRs and WASL.

I can't figure out how we're going to get kids ready to take the WASL by 10th grade. We have a lot of kids coming in to us at very low levels of skill. I'm not saying it's impossible, but it's tough for our kids, and we're fighting a losing battle. Is the WASL the "end-all" indicator of success and knowledge? How do you compensate for where kids come from? On the other hand, how do you put teeth into the standards without being serious about kids meeting them?

Student Perspectives

Teachers are just starting to increase standards and expectations for students, to show students that they need to come to school. Teachers are going to have to change the way they teach starting in 4th grade and all the way through.

I'm glad I didn't have to pass the WASL to graduate. It didn't count, so we didn't really care, but we still felt some pressure to do well. I got the impression that how we did on the test would reflect on the teachers. They felt more pressure than we did. But maybe that's good. They're going to need to teach us the stuff if it's going to be on the test.

There are going to be a lot more dropouts from kids who don't pass the WASL. It's not their fault—they're not in good classes, and they're not pushed by their parents.

Options and Strategies to Make Learning More Relevant For Students

In 1999, Sunnyside established a portfolio for each student where teachers place examples of students' best work throughout high school. The portfolios are kept in a portfolio room staffed by a teacher's aide. However, staff and students agree that more work is needed to make the portfolio a useful tool for students and to integrate it with educational planning and career pathways.

Sunnyside also developed a booklet that categorizes various occupations into five broad career clusters or pathways and illustrates how students might choose high school courses based on the pathways. The occupations range from those that require no additional education to those that require graduate and post-graduate study. Counselors explain the booklet to students, but most teachers and students are not aware of the pathways. Most career and guidance counseling occurs through student-initiated visits to the counseling office.

Counselors have students complete an education plan for their four years of high school, along with some indication of what they might do their first year after graduation. The plan is kept in the student's file.

In November 2000, Sunnyside had its first meeting to discuss requiring a senior project. Staff would like to see integration among the portfolio, career pathways, educational plan, and senior project in order to make them more meaningful for students.

2000–2001 Implementation Stage	Experienced (3–4 years)	In Process (1–2 years)	Starting (First Year)	Actively Planning	No Definite Plans
Career Pathways		✓			
Culminating Project				✓	
Portfolios		✓			
Education Plan	✓				
Mentor Program					✓
Service Learning					✓

Sunnyside offers an array of vocational education courses and has been working with the local community college to create an articulated curriculum so students can earn college credit for technical courses. Advanced Placement courses are also widely available, although staff share the same concern as other schools that Running Start has a negative impact on enrollment in Advanced Placement. Staff and students generally believe that Sunnyside High School meets the educational needs of students regardless of whether they are college-bound, headed immediately for work, or uncertain of their future plans, because the high school offers a large number of options and programs for students. They believe it is up to students to take responsibility for exploring and pursuing these options.

Administrator Perspectives

Although the portfolio was initiated two years ago, it didn't really have a direction. Every teacher is supposed to put in students' best work, but we need guidelines for the type of materials that go in. We've known for some time where our courses fit into career pathways, but we don't use the pathways booklet for course registration. I wouldn't expect kids to know which pathway they are in. We'd like the portfolio to reflect a student's chosen pathway, but again, we're not there yet. We also need to figure out how to work the portfolio, senior project, and pathways into the curriculum and provide more in-service to staff.

We've put a lot of focus on our vocational classes. We train students to be nursing assistants to local hospitals; the construction program is building a Habitat for Humanity house; we have A+ certification in information technology. We're hoping these will continue to be a draw, especially for students who don't meet the 10th grade standards. We're going to need something to offer them if they can't get a diploma. We lose some students to Running Start, but it doesn't seem like a huge number. There's really no money for job shadow or internships. It requires a huge coordination effort to start and sustain School-to-Work activities.

Teacher Perspectives

There's not really a buy-in yet for the portfolio process. There are no benchmarks for what to put in, no common understanding of its purpose, no money to support the time it takes. The purpose of the portfolio should be to show students that they're more well-rounded than they think. They need to explain that and show it, to communicate to the community about what they've learned. We're just starting to talk about a senior project. My concern is they'll try to shift the responsibility to a single department. We're not doing much with pathways at this school. We used to have a careers class, but I think we got rid of it. It's nice to have a booklet about career opportunities, but unless it's reinforced after the first week of school, it's not going to have any meaning.

Running Start is a wonderful thing for families, but it's controversial at the school. Most teachers feel it's a poor choice to send high school students into college. We're starting to talk more to students about Advanced Placement and Skills Center as options. But planting that seed in 11th grade is too late. Students need to build these options into their plan from the very start in order to take advantage of opportunities later. We're doing our best to educate kids. There's not a lot more we could do. Kids get all the help they need if they take the initiative and seek it out. The main thing is we've got lots of different programs and options with a big school. Every student ought to be able to find a niche.

Student Perspectives

It sounds like a good thing to show your best work in a portfolio and present it, but the concept hasn't been followed up. We talked about it the first year, but not since then. I think they're in a room somewhere. A senior project might get us more engaged in school, maybe get us out serving the community. We have career pathways, I think. We got a booklet that shows what careers you can pursue depending on what classes you take; I haven't used it since we got it. I'd like to see the counselors more involved in this area.

Running Start is a good program for some students. I liked the different atmosphere; here the teachers babysit the other students a lot. There are a lot of AP opportunities, but they don't work very well with a block schedule. I'd love to do a job shadow, but nobody really knows about it or could help set it up. They should stress more that freshmen find out what they want to do and what's required to get there. We're not really confronted with choices or what our options are. I simply signed up for as many advanced classes as I could and hoped for the best. It would be good to think about it more constructively, but you also need the ability to change your mind.

Parent Perspectives

We first heard about the portfolio a few years ago. They encouraged students to set goals and think about what they wanted to do. They've never done that before; I think it's good for the kids. Having students take a career class to explore their options, learn about job applications, interviews, work skills, would be of value to kids. There doesn't seem to be much of that going on.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Future

Although staff and students believe Sunnyside High School provides students with many choices, they are also concerned about how to motivate students to succeed in school and consider their futures, particularly those who are at risk of dropping out. Increasing parent involvement was frequently cited as a recurring challenge. Some believe reducing class size would help at-risk students. Others maintain that it is up to students to take individual responsibility for their own achievement.

Administrator Perspectives

The focus on "transition" is another new aspect of high school we haven't adapted to yet. Teachers need to be concentrating on the future as they teach students. A big part of our problem is that our students don't SEE a future. We just don't seem to be able to make the connection between life and success and school. Motivation is just a huge issue. Parents need training and help to understand what they need to do to get kids engaged in school. We try to encourage parent contact, but not that many parents come to meetings.

Teacher Perspectives

Dropouts are a huge problem. There's not much of anything yet that would keep at-risk kids in school. We have many ESL students who have enormous challenges with school. We need to work to find small successes for every student because success is what motivates people. Kids also need positive role models. But I can't teach self-worth or desire. That they have to get from home or within themselves. More responsibility has to be put back on students for their own learning. The only thing that might make any difference is reducing class size.

Student Perspectives

Kids drop out because they get into trouble or their parents don't push them to continue. Why would they stay? Nobody asks you for a diploma if you're working; it doesn't really mean anything. Our families push us to stay in school and some of us want to go to college, but others don't. There's some connection to teachers, but mostly on an individual basis. Some teachers really make the effort to get to know us, but the classes are pretty big.

Parent Perspectives

There are too many kids in class. I talked to a counselor about why my student wasn't doing writing assignments and was told the instructor didn't have a planning period and didn't have time to grade all the writing. Kids could do better in school with smaller classes.

MARK MORRIS HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Mark Morris High School is one of two comprehensive high schools in the 7,600-student Longview School District in southwest Washington. The other high school, R. A. Long, is located nearby, and the two schools provide transportation back and forth each period to expand the courses and programs available for students. There is no alternative high school, although the Monarch Program at Mark Morris offers credit retrieval and an alternative learning environment through after-school tutoring and contract-based learning. Mark Morris is also located within walking distance of Lower Columbia Community College.

STUDENT DATA	MARK MORRIS HIGH SCHOOL	STATEWIDE (GRADES 9–12)
FALL 2000 ENROLLMENT (HEADCOUNT)	1,147	310,403
PERCENT MINORITY	9%	23%
PERCENT FREE & REDUCED LUNCH	16%	31%*

*Grades K–12

For 2000–2001, Mark Morris High School had 58 certificated staff, 39 classified and support staff, and 3 administrators.

Strategies to Improve Student Learning

As part of the "Pathway to Tomorrow" portfolio (described below), teachers have been working to create at least one standards-based project or product for each class offered at Mark Morris High School. These products are called "quality work." An example of quality work must have clearly established expectations and a grading rubric so students know what characteristics and attributes their work must have in order to meet the standards. The samples of quality work must also align with the EALRs. Quality work is intended to be a special project or activity rather than a test, but it could be an assignment expected of all students in the class. If multiple teachers teach different sections of the same course, they are expected to collaborate to set common standards for the products.

Students must complete at least one sample of quality work each year that meets the established standards (totaling four samples by graduation). Three samples must be from different subjects (such as social studies/English or science/math) and one sample can be a subject chosen by the student. Starting in 2001, the high school course catalog will describe the opportunities students have to produce quality work in each class. The class of 2004 will be the first group of students required to submit quality work in order to graduate.

Institute researchers visited Mark Morris High School on March 8 and 9, 2001. We interviewed the principal, 25 teachers, 26 students, and met with 11 members of a parent advisory group. Thank you to Principal Gary Kipp for facilitating our site visit.

Staff at Mark Morris find the process of defining quality work both challenging and rewarding but express concern about students who may not be able to produce work that meets the standards by the time they are supposed to graduate.

The most significant curriculum change at Mark Morris occurred several years ago with a move to Integrated Math, which includes geometry, algebra, and other math concepts. There is a three-level sequence for math (Integrated I, II, and III). Starting with the class of 2004, students must successfully complete Integrated I to graduate. To help students who struggle with math, Integrated I is also offered as a two-year sequence.

Administrator Perspectives

Students will be able to pick what they think is their best work, but we realized that their definition of "best" might not demonstrate "sufficient." Standards-based education causes us to re-think these indicators of what best or sufficient work really is. This has represented a major work effort for the staff. For some classes it was easy. Vocational classes, for example, have long been performance and standards-based. But in many other courses, a student's performance is still assessed by grading papers and exams, not on scoring work that is based on standards. Marking a grade isn't the same thing as defining a standard and evaluating the work based on that standard. This is a huge shift from just grading, and it causes teachers to do a lot more work.

Teacher Perspectives

In real life, you have to meet standards. You can't just submit something on the job and say, "That's the best I can do." We want students to understand the difference and realize they might have to redo things until they reach the standard. It's been a bit of a struggle for the academic teachers to develop clear expectations for what quality work is. The act of setting the standard has focused instruction and caused a real increase in collaboration across staff. It's exciting to see the discussion taking place across departments. This adds another layer of complexity to teaching and learning and forces us to be better teachers. It also encourages students to look differently at their work. They will be able to see that the standard is the same for everyone, regardless of their attitude or behavior in class. It sets the expectations higher and gets kids accustomed to thinking about quality, not just completion.

What concerns me is how we will deal with the student who has not completed each piece of quality work but meets all the other graduation requirements. I'm a little skeptical about what might happen when the rubber hits the road and Johnny can't walk across the stage at graduation. I hope we're able to say that quality work matters and the expectations were clear, but it will be a true test of the district's commitment to these standards.

Student Perspectives

"Best work," "quality work"; it's a little confusing right now. I'm not sure I see the purpose or goal at the end. I think the teachers are trying to control too much what samples we select. They won't let us pick what we want, or they say it isn't good enough. They don't give you enough options.

Parent Perspectives

I think students here are expected to be quality producers and quality workers. We need to encourage students to seek the most rigorous education they can find.

Impact of EALRs and WASL

Mark Morris' scores on the 10th grade WASL roughly reflect the state average, although the proportion of their students meeting the reading standard increased at a higher rate than at schools across the state. For the last five years, the site action plan has heavily emphasized improved reading and writing skills.

10th Grade WASL Results	Students Meeting Standard: Mark Morris High School		Students Meeting Standard: Statewide	
	1998–1999	1999–2000	1998–1999	1999–2000
Reading	56%	73%	51%	60%
Mathematics	32%	35%	33%	35%
Writing	40%	36%	41%	32%
Listening	75%	83%	73%	78%

Most staff believe the EALRs provide a clear focus for teachers and continuity in the curriculum for students. The science department has moved to general science for all students in order to cover the content of the EALRs, but other adaptations in course content to align with the EALRs were largely left to individual teachers. Preparing students for the WASL has changed most teachers' testing practices, particularly expanding the amount of writing, requiring different styles of writing, and having students explain their reasoning.

Mark Morris has begun to take steps to address remediation, especially as students transition into the high school. The "JumpStart" program targets students with low 7th grade WASL scores and offers a two-week intensive summer program before school starts. Fewer than 20 students have participated in each of the last two years. Staff hope to work with parents to convince them that more students would benefit from additional assistance.

During the school year, the "FreshStart" program provides a three-hour block schedule in science, English, and social studies for approximately 70 incoming freshmen who struggled in middle school. The students have the same three teachers all year for the block. This year Mark Morris also created a reading class for students who do not qualify for special education but nevertheless need additional assistance to improve their reading skills. Staff are concerned that the need to remediate students who do not pass the WASL will reduce the availability of electives, both for students who could fit electives into their schedules and within the school as a whole, as more resources would be devoted to remediation.

Administrator Perspectives

The implications of a Certificate of Mastery and the WASL are that if a lot of students don't pass, it has a huge impact on curriculum. We in education don't have a good track record with remediation. We haven't had to deal with it. We just report on how kids compare to each other. Standards switches to a student-focused system: What do we have to do to ensure that this child achieves to the standard? This thinking will have to become pervasive, but it isn't yet.

Teacher Perspectives

The EALRs help us focus by providing the big picture of what learning is and should be. It has made more work, that's for sure, especially with all the focus on writing. In science, we had to get more standardized and less specialized. Face it, some of us like bugs; others like plants. But we need to be held accountable for ensuring that all students receive a breadth of instruction in science. In English, it seems like we're endlessly picking apart the curriculum. The EALRs make us all "get it" and tie everything we do together. They help with communicating to parents, too. We can explain that these are the standards the state expects every student to meet.

I'm frustrated at the time administering the WASL takes out of class. We're not yet able to use the results as a learning tool. Actually, I think it's reasonable to expect students to pass these tests. I think the WASL pushes staff in the right direction. But the message a single test sends is inconsistent with other messages we receive about creating alternatives for students and adapting to different learning styles. So which message are we supposed to follow?

I worry about losing the class variety that appeals to both students and teachers. There's no impact yet because students aren't held accountable for passing the test. We need to think about remediation differently. We envision remedial classes as separate, providing review, drills, basics. But the best thing would be to put students in an exciting learning environment, not have them take stuff over. Skills classes are boring; they'll just drop out.

Student Perspectives

The WASL is a better test for reading and writing because you have to explain your rationale. It's a better indication of your knowledge and represents more of what we're doing in school. I think they should look at what we do in school rather than place so much emphasis on a single test. It's a good goal, but our numbers are really low. That could be because no one took it seriously. If students were interested, most would try hard. But some will still say it's a waste of time.

Maybe they should put more activities in the classroom ahead of time to prepare for the test. They should either make the test easier or teach more about what will be tested, not only in terms of the subjects but the way you're supposed to think about them.

Parent Perspectives

I like that we are expecting students to attain a certain level of mastery, not just that students are compared to each other. However, we originally thought the WASL was just going to be one of many measures that would monitor whether students were meeting the EALRs. I despair that education reform has come to focus solely on the WASL. There is the perception that teachers are spending more time teaching to the test and that students lose out on other school work.

Options and Strategies to Make Learning More Relevant For Students

In 1995, the Longview School Board established exit outcomes to be demonstrated by all graduating students. Students are expected to be "Responsible Citizens, Quality Producers, Resourceful Thinkers, Effective Communicators, Self-Directed Learners, and Knowledgeable Persons." Student competencies on the outcomes, however, were never formally assessed. Then, in 2000, the school board determined that some outcomes should be demonstrated by a culminating project, including an oral presentation. Although students at R. A. Long were already required to complete a senior research paper, Mark

Morris decided to create a project that would explicitly align with the district's exit outcomes and the state learning goals, as well as extend over the duration of a student's high school experience.

2000–2001 Implementation Stage	Experienced (3–4 years)	In Process (1–2 years)	Starting (First Year)	Actively Planning	No Definite Plans
Career Pathways		✓			
Culminating Project				✓	
Portfolios		✓			
Education Plan		✓			
Mentor Program		✓			
Service Learning		✓			

The "Pathway to Tomorrow" project was initiated in 1999 and is being phased over five years. The class of 2004 (who are currently freshmen) will be the first class to complete all five components of the project:

- **Student Work Portfolio**, including the four required samples of quality work as well as student-selected samples of their best work.
- **Citizenship Portfolio**, including a requirement that students either complete 24 hours of community service over four years of high school or research a community issue that could be affected by government processes and write a paper presenting their findings and recommendations.
- **Career Portfolio**, with interest surveys, education plan, goals, resumes, and optional job shadow or internship experiences. Students receive guidance on career pathways. Starting with the class of 2004, students must take at least two elective credits in the same pathway group.
- **Academic Portfolio**, with transcripts and test scores.
- **Celebration Presentation**, occurring at the end of the senior year. Students present their portfolios and explain how they have met the district's exit outcomes and state learning goals.

To support the project, Mark Morris has created an advisory period where students meet with a teacher once a month. Students will stay with this same teacher throughout high school. A common set of lesson plans for each grade level is being created by a project committee. Teachers prepare for the advisory and work on other staff development activities during a three-hour late arrival each month. An extensive website has been developed explaining the project and portfolio contents in detail, and teachers hope to include videos and assignment samples to further assist both students and parents.

Pathway to Tomorrow is in its second year of implementation and, as a group, staff are strongly supportive of its objectives and optimistic that the difficulties of a large school-wide project will be worked out. Common concerns include lack of clarity in how various parts of the project are supposed to work, the additional time required by the project, and the difficulty of convincing many students of the project's value.

Administrator Perspectives

The district decided that both high schools needed some sort of culminating project that would reflect the learning outcomes. We decided to develop something from the ground up. Some culminating projects are part of an assessment; ours is a celebration. The kids should say, "Look who I am and what I can do," on a variety of different dimensions.

We want to take students to a new level in terms of critical thinking and self-knowledge. We want them to reflect on their portfolio and how the content changes over time. We're growing as a staff as we implement the project. The project will change as time goes on, but we have a good foundation laid. For example, we haven't really begun tackling the career pathways electives requirement. Our career activities are intended to help students understand themselves—their strengths and weaknesses. Our role is to teach kids who they are. The portfolios are very introspective in nature.

We'll have to continue to look at this and figure out how to use the advisory time most effectively. Creating this type of program doesn't come easily at the high school level. Teachers are accustomed to being masters at their subject, not necessarily in dealing with kids on such a personal level across a wide range of issues.

Teacher Perspectives

We came away feeling that an end-of-the-year research paper wouldn't do what we wanted for kids. We wanted it to be worthwhile for them, provide them with practical skills. A transcript doesn't always illustrate a student's aptitudes and interests. Portfolios are a good way to do that, and they give all students a direction to follow.

I hope the portfolios get students involved in school and make them realize there's more to getting an education than just getting credits or putting in your time. We're trying to change a mind set. We want to get both reflection and student growth. Students need to look at how to plan, be involved in their own futures. Pathways are about focus. We're not trying to pigeon-hole them. What we want is for kids to know there are groups of careers and occupations, consider their options in light of their skills and interests, and find out what it will take to achieve their goals. Kids need to see that a mix of interests and goals are valued, not just those for high achieving students. We're trying to reach every student, not just the college-bound.

Time will tell whether we're creating an uprising of either students or teachers. We're all reasonably convinced that this is the right thing to do, but we have logged in a lot of extra hours. This would not be possible without our late starts and training provided by the project committee. It's a little hard to find out what we're supposed to be doing because the project is evolving and constantly being tweaked. We're not even sure what the end product looks like yet. We have a lot of work to do to convince the students. To them, this is just another hoop to jump through. Eventually, we'll have kids selling the concept to their peers because it will become meaningful.

Student Perspectives

The portfolios are supposed to prepare you for your career or college, to give you ideas for what you might want to do. It's supposed to be something you show. I think the community service part is a good idea because everyone should volunteer and get started early in life doing that. I think career advice helps you see how what you do now and what your interests are might relate to some future career choice. You might find out about options you weren't aware of.

I don't see a major purpose or goal of putting together all this information. How will I use it? They're trying to push the goal-setting idea, but students who don't care just skip the advisory period altogether and those of us who are dedicated already know what we want, so what's the point? It's a little confusing right now with all the different pieces. But once it gets straightened out, it could be good, especially for students who aren't going to college.

Parent Perspectives

There seems to be more emphasis on explaining lots of different pathways and careers. The project has helped my son focus on where his strengths and weaknesses are. The careers aren't set in stone; the pathways are just trying to help students direct their attention toward their future. It helped my daughter eliminate choices, rather than wait until college and change her major four times like I did. My son felt frustrated and pressured. I don't think the students always know what these activities are for; they could be communicated better. More needs to be done to give kids guidance, but we don't want to limit their options.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Future

Staff at Mark Morris support the need for accountability, particularly as a way to encourage students to take learning more seriously and to meet higher expectations for learning. But they realize it takes time to make changes, and it can be a challenge to meet competing demands from high-achieving students (who sometimes resent projects that apply to all students), seniors (who want to be finished with high school), and parents (who want smaller class sizes and more flexibility for individual students).

Administrator Perspectives

I think Certificate of Mastery is something we should embrace. If you're trying to build a system that holds schools accountable, you also have to hold students accountable, especially in the later grades. Otherwise they may not put out their best effort and the school, but not the students, are culpable for that behavior. I hope the state has patience to stay the course, even if we need to tweak what it requires to achieve a certificate.

Teacher Perspectives

My concern is we're front-loading everything. We expect more of freshmen and the least from seniors. Advising seniors is painful. They just don't want to be here. In order to get them to participate in school, they have to be held accountable. I'm not sure we've figured out what the purpose of high school is. I'm not sure we can do it all—meet all the different expectations. We're doing a much better job and doing things we haven't been doing before, but I'm concerned about the lack of funding to support the type of effort we're making, particularly with the portfolios.

Student Perspectives

There are a lot of electives to choose from and a variety of classes at different levels of difficulty—I think that's what I like the best. They're trying to force fit things like the portfolio on the whole school, but it doesn't help me personally. I already know what I want to do. Other kids can go meet with a counselor if they want. It's their choice.

Parent Perspectives

Class sizes are way too big, and they get bigger every year. The state needs to give schools time to see this phase of change through to completion before they make any more changes. We need a system that is flexible, with lots of options for students. If students are already successful, they should be able to bypass a lot of the requirements. Wasn't this all supposed to be about students moving at their own pace and not being tied to seat time?

NATHAN HALE HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Nathan Hale High School in north Seattle is considered a small school with 1,089 students in a district of over 13,700 students in grades 9 through 12. Nathan Hale is one of 11 comprehensive high schools in the Seattle School District. The district also offers numerous alternative school programs. The district has a choice policy where students can apply to attend any high school in the district. About 90 percent of students were assigned to their first or second choice of high schools in 2000.

STUDENT DATA	NATHAN HALE HIGH SCHOOL	STATEWIDE (GRADES 9–12)
FALL 2000 ENROLLMENT (HEADCOUNT)	1,089	310,403
PERCENT MINORITY	39%	23%
PERCENT FREE & REDUCED LUNCH	27%	31%*

*Grades K–12

Nathan Hale has been a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools (CES) network since 1997 and has received a number of grants from CES and OSPI to implement a model of high school reform that emphasizes personalized education, inclusion (students of all abilities are expected to meet the same standards), and intensive professional development for staff. Nathan Hale also reports the highest number of parent volunteer hours of any Seattle public high school. Nathan Hale High School has 64 certificated staff, including administrators, and 25 classified and support staff.

Strategies to Improve Student Learning

In 1998, in keeping with CES principles to personalize education, Nathan Hale divided all 9th graders into two academies, each staffed by six teachers with a student-teacher ratio of approximately 20:1. The academies are a two-period, three-hour block in humanities (language arts and social studies) and health/science. Twenty minutes of each block is devoted to reading. Students complete coursework in one block during the first quarter and switch to the other block for second quarter, but they stay with the same group of students throughout the year.

The academies are designed to facilitate integration of curriculum, encourage group work, and provide more time with one teacher than a traditional schedule. Teachers collaborate to integrate the curriculum and formulate group projects using an additional common planning period created for this purpose.

Institute researchers visited Nathan Hale High School on January 18 and 19, 2001. We were able to interview the principal, approximately 31 teachers and staff, 22 students, and 7 parents. We also observed several classes and toured the school with a group of prospective parents and students. A special thank you to Principal Eric Benson for arranging the visit and all the teachers who welcomed us into their classrooms.

The academies are inclusive so students of all levels of ability, including special education and ESL students, are taught in the same classes. Through additional independent work, students can earn an honors option. Homework assignments are coordinated among teachers and closely monitored. Each student is required to keep a logbook of assignments to increase accountability.

In 1999, Nathan Hale extended this model by introducing "Integrated Studies" in 10th grade. Three groups of students participate in inclusive, integrated classes in language arts, social studies, and science. The Integrated Studies block lasts for three periods, and students return to a traditional six-period schedule for the rest of the day. Units and material in the three courses are organized around a common theme, such as "What Is a System?" or "How Do We Measure Progress?" As with the 9th grade academies, 10th grade teachers collaborate to plan the curriculum, and students can opt for extra work to earn an honors distinction. Some teachers chose to stay with the same class as they moved from 9th to 10th grade.

Nathan Hale has a staff team that strongly supports the integrated, inclusive, and personal model of education used in the academies. Nevertheless, it can sometimes be a challenge to convince high-achieving students and their parents that the inclusion model is as rigorous as a traditional honors program.

Administrator Perspectives

In 1997, we created a design team that included parents, students, and teachers. We started with defining a belief system for the school. We then set about building a structure to support the fundamental belief that ALL students are successful at this school. We had 20 people apply for the 12 positions to teach in the academy.

We're teaching at honors level for all students—that's our belief. But the inclusion notion is very non-traditional. We need to have parents philosophically believe that it is best not to track students. The hardest thing about all of this is the teamwork and collaboration—it takes a tremendous amount of time and is very hard work.

Teacher Perspectives

This is a tremendously supportive place for kids. It's not like other schools. Students feel that people care about them, and they have a good feeling about school. They are more trustful of teachers; they're helpful and participatory in groups. The collaboration among teachers allows for additional support and communication about students' needs and progress—nobody can fall through the cracks.

Through collaboration with other teachers, I've come up with better, more challenging, and more imaginative classes. We cover more ground, and the topics are more up to date and relevant to the students. Projects are the best part of the academy. But you really pay the price with time. Creating innovative projects that link themes but still teach the content and skills takes a lot of work. It can be difficult for teachers of different subjects; we almost need to be cross-credentialed.

The inclusion model seems to be making inroads into the achievement gap between minority and white students. High-end kids are not going as far as in a tracked system, but general student performance is considerably higher. Honors students don't feel they get the depth they want. I'm not sure I agree, but that's what they perceive. It's wonderful to have students interact. That's life: different types of people all having to work and learn together.

Student Perspectives

The academy really eases the transition for 9th graders. You feel a different atmosphere in the hallways. I like the relationships between students and teachers. There's a sense of family. Everybody is so nice—it's weird! I like people's open-mindedness at this school and acceptance of people who are different. Sometimes I get tired of being with the same people and the same teachers in all of my classes.

I like the group work because it's like that in real life. Group work is some of the hardest work in life. I remember a lot of what I learned in the integrated subjects. It was relevant, not like memorizing stuff just for a test. The classes connect to each other. It's a rigorous curriculum. Homework is expected and completed. There's a high rate of doing all the assignments. I don't know if I would be in the same place if I hadn't done the academy. You get to know a more diverse group of people. It's not just that you're grouped with honors students and the other students are left behind.

It's cool to work in themes, but sometimes it's a stretch. They try to integrate too much, and I get tired of all the projects. They try to treat us the same, but we're not the same. The honors contract doesn't really challenge you. It's just busywork, and you don't really learn content beyond what is in class. I get tired of people who don't care and don't do the work. I'm not able to show my honors work. I want to be a doctor, and I need to be able to show that I put in extra effort.

Parent Perspectives

Ninth grade academies are a great bridge from middle to high school—they're very personal. The small school environment is wonderful, and they have great parent/teacher communication. The teachers are really on top of the students and ride herd on them to make wise choices. Parents are more involved here than at other schools. The open-door policy is great. I can come in whenever I want and so can any other parent, and the teachers make you feel welcome, they expect you to come. I have never seen a group of teachers work so hard for kids.

I don't think students are challenged enough. The honors contract isn't really comparable to a true honors program. They're not pushed by their peers to excel. The kids stay together with the same grade level so much they don't interact with different age groups, which is part of the maturing process. I was not a real fan of the inclusion model when I first looked at it. It seemed it would raise the performance of lower-end students but lower the performance of higher-end students. What I discovered was the performance of all students was much greater than I expected. What I like is that students with disabilities are in the class, and other students have a chance to interact and get to know them.

Impact of EALRs and WASL

Nathan Hale's 10th grade WASL scores show significant gains in reading, math, and listening from 1999 to 2000. Writing scores also rose slightly.

10th Grade WASL Results	Students Meeting Standard: Nathan Hale High School		Students Meeting Standard: Statewide	
	1998–1999	1999–2000	1998–1999	1999–2000
Reading	47%	66%	51%	60%
Mathematics	33%	47%	33%	35%
Writing	39%	39%	41%	32%
Listening	71%	82%	73%	78%

Similar to other schools, Nathan Hale examined the curriculum for alignment with the EALRs but made few significant changes. Their overall impression was that the essential learnings were already adequately covered and any increased focus on reading and writing has resulted from their internal school reforms rather than state reforms. There are district-wide learning benchmarks for each grade level from kindergarten through 10th grade, and the district is in the process of developing common course outlines and assessments for each grade. Staff at Nathan Hale are concerned about the impact that increased standardization in the curriculum could have on their approach to integration across subjects.

Within the academies, support staff and special education assistants "float" between classes, offering remedial assistance to students. Resource rooms are also available both for special needs students and any students who are struggling. Staff are uncertain how remediation for the WASL will occur but believe it is unlikely the current inclusion model would be affected.

Administrator Perspectives

Our participation in the Coalition of Essential Schools is the driver of what we're doing here. Education reform objectives tie in with what we're doing, but they're not driving us. The structure of the academies helps at-risk students by definition. Nobody will be allowed to fall through the cracks.

Teacher Perspectives

The EALRs have been a strong guide for curriculum, but for the most part our reaction was "Aren't we already doing that?" The pressure to do things comes from inside the school, not externally. I think we anticipated the whole standards movement. The legislature is catching up with us, not the other way around. We don't teach to the WASL. I'd like to believe that the WASL will be a living document and will change to measure important things. There are different ways to assess learning, and I think we're trying a number of those ways. I'm not sure "education reform" equals "EALRs and WASL." We're focused on the overall learning climate and making sure all students achieve.

Student Perspectives

I normally really hate tests, especially timed tests, but on the WASL I was really prepared, and it gave me a chance to explain my answers so even if I had the answer wrong I could show more of what I knew. I thought it was better than other standardized testing because it wasn't just multiple choice where you could guess. I felt I had the knowledge to do the WASL, but the process of how to take the test was really different. It caters to a certain learning style. It was a better measurement of what you know.

I think standardized testing is a pretty flawed concept in general. Isn't the big question about whether standards are going to have to be lowered because so many can't pass? It's not just a question of refining the test but getting the curriculum to match up with what's tested. If the WASL reflects what students should know, then students might take school more seriously. But the test isn't ready yet.

Parent Perspectives

We've had discussions about whether the WASL is consistent with applied learning, project-based learning, and our ways of assessing students. I think the state is trying to make it a meaningful test, to balance assessing the school and assessing the students at the same time. The concern is with the lack of diagnostic feedback for teachers and parents and the lack of adequate accommodations for different students. There must be some way of getting feedback, some mechanism for helping a child who doesn't do well. I don't think teachers are stressing the WASL all that much. They're more concerned about the kids themselves and whether they're learning. You can't test loyalty, caring, yet these are important components of what is taught here. I have a concern about the amount of time it takes to give the test.

Options and Strategies to Make Learning More Relevant For Students

2000–2001 Implementation Stage	Experienced (3–4 years)	In Process (1–2 years)	Starting (First Year)	Actively Planning	No Definite Plans
Career Pathways					✓
Culminating Project	✓				
Portfolios		✓			
Education Plan					✓
Mentor Program	✓				
Service Learning	✓				

Through the academies, all 9th-grade students prepare a portfolio that includes representative pieces of their best work, reflection letters, and a class presentation at the end of the year. Tenth-grade students complete a portfolio, but only as part of their language arts course. Portfolios are not currently continued beyond 10th grade.

Nathan Hale students complete major projects in both 11th and 12th grades:

- For the Junior Action Project, students select a current issue where action or change is needed, research the issue (including academic research, interviews, and presentation of differing points of view), create and implement an action plan to address or publicize the issue, and make a final presentation of their project. Many students use the Action Project to complete the 60 hours of community service learning required for graduation.

- The Senior Project also requires research, action, writing, and a culminating presentation, but the range of activities and products tends to be broader, such as an art work, applied technology, or a performance. Students complete the project through their senior language arts class.

All students are assigned a teacher as a mentor, and time is set aside to meet during an advisory period two days a week. Teachers stay with the same students for the first two years, and advisory is an integral part of the 9th and 10th grade academies. After that, students can change mentors, and use of the advisory period is less structured.

Nathan Hale considered using career pathways as a school reform model but chose the academies instead, in part because they considered the school too small to create a meaningful variety of courses to support different pathways. The career counselor takes an individual approach in encouraging students to discuss career options, suggesting courses that might fit their interests and helping them with applications. A new internship coordinator was hired this year with district School-to-Work funds. The onus is largely on the students to seek out information and opportunities regarding careers.

Administrator Perspectives

Actually, the advisory was a student-generated activity. They were reading Theodore Sizer's book about personalization in high schools as part of a class, and they decided to create the advisory because they thought it would be good for students. That was our first step.

Teacher Perspectives

The portfolios help students realize they're learning to standards. It's also a wonderful tool for us to see how we're doing as teachers. But I think it's one of the things we're doing that doesn't count very much. It's largely busy work. The various projects are a continuation of project-based learning that goes on throughout the school. We could work more to tie them to the essential learnings, but I'm not sure where we'd find the time to do that.

The focus of advisory is on personalization. In the academies, every mentor is supposed to work on a topic. After that, there's really no single use of the time. Some use it as a study hall, some just talk to the kids. We read. I use it to become an expert on my kids. We socialize, talk about things that are going on in their lives. I'd like to strengthen the career aspects of advisory.

We've gone back and forth on the job stuff and how to fit it into the curriculum. I'd like to see more focus on work transition, and I think we'll be returning to that discussion. What we have now is not systematic. We were concerned about pigeonholing students too early. Plus it's a huge effort to try to coordinate a curriculum and tie things together along career themes. A lot of students want to know what they can DO with their skills. But that's their job to find out. It's a CES principle that students are responsible to be engaged as learners, and teachers are just here as coaches.

Student Perspectives

Junior Action Project teaches you real-life skills. It's like community service, but more research-oriented. You do something in the community and learn something about being self-less. Senior Project is supposed to be something you wouldn't otherwise do—something to be proud of. It's all stuff we've done before with all the other projects, but in the long run, it's a good thing.

Advisory is like homeroom. It's supposed to be a time for interaction with the teacher and bonding with a small group of students. I'd like to know what the teacher's style is as a mentor before having to pick one. Every teacher does different things. If you're having trouble with a class or scheduling or you just need someone to listen to you, it's less formal than organizing to go and see a counselor.

They really push sophomores to make an appointment with the career center. It's a great place and has lots of resources, but it's a little hidden. It should be more connected to students. I'd like to have more field trips to see different occupations and more people to come in and talk to us. There should be more internships and job shadows. The career interest surveys don't really tell you anything.

Parent Perspectives

The projects are a great way for students to get out of the box—to show their creativity and engage them in school. They have to think for themselves. It's somewhat humbling to learn how little adults respect and know about what students are capable of.

The career center is trying to get kids out into the workforce so they can see what their options are. I'd like to see students explore and research their options. Even though there isn't much structure to career education here, it seems to happen. I would worry about a forced choice too early in their lives.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Future

Despite agreement among staff, students, and parents that the academy model of integrated and inclusive classes is working well in 9th and 10th grades, Nathan Hale has not yet decided whether or how to extend that model into the upper grades. Proposals have been debated but put on hold for a number of reasons, including concern over finding time for teachers to collaborate and students' desire for more independence and options as juniors and seniors.

Administrator Perspectives

Fundamentally, what matters is teacher-initiated change. If you give teachers time and support they can come up with the answers. Last year we voted to wait on moving the integrated model into 11th and 12th grades. We needed to think more about how to create a whole school reform model. We'll do it. We're committed to it.

Teacher Perspectives

I was here at the beginning of the reforms and never before has a school reformed so successfully while still running. We've invested a lot, but there's some sense of exhaustion. A key to the academy model is collaboration among teachers, and that gets expensive when you extend it to more teachers.

The academy approach already has an effect on 11th and 12th grades. Those kids are never absent, they're great at group work and applied learning, and they communicate and present very well. But there are some drawbacks. Students are accustomed to being nurtured. They're not used to doing individual work and being held accountable as individuals. They find that transition to 11th grade a little challenging. We have 9th and 10th graders excited about learning, but once in 11th and 12th grade they start to segregate themselves into honors and not-honors and all the old issues come back. How do you generate excitement while still providing a complex, rigorous, and engaging curriculum for all students?

Student Perspectives

I liked the integration of classes and the small groups, but I felt the academies didn't prepare me that well for regular high school, like when I became a junior. There was lots of individualized attention and a lot of structured teacher involvement. But after that, you had to be more independent. It was hard to adjust. I think once we're juniors and seniors, we need more opportunities and choices.

Parent Perspectives

Students don't really feel prepared for being a junior or senior. They haven't had much experience with independent work and writing. The staff is pretty split on what to do with 11th and 12th grade, but they're still working together. It's not divisive, it's just something they need to work through.

SEQUIM HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Sequim High School is located in a medium-sized town on the Olympic Peninsula. It is the only comprehensive high school for the district of 2,900 students, although there is an alternative high school serving approximately 95 students. Sequim has a large number of students attending Running Start at Peninsula Community College in nearby Port Angeles. About 26 percent of the juniors and seniors were enrolled in Running Start during the fall of 2000. Few students attend the Olympic Skills Consortium, also in Port Angeles.

STUDENT DATA	SEQUIM HIGH SCHOOL	STATEWIDE (GRADES 9–12)
FALL 2000 ENROLLMENT (HEADCOUNT)	935	310,403
PERCENT MINORITY	12%	23%
PERCENT FREE & REDUCED LUNCH	18%	31%*

*Grades K–12

For 2000–2001, Sequim High School had 50 certificated staff, 20 classified and support staff, and 8 administrators. The principal, assistant principal, and district superintendent are new to the district in 2000–2001.

Strategies to Improve Student Learning

Staff describe the school curriculum as traditional, with a focus on academic subjects. Courses are offered with little integration across departments or between academic and vocational subjects. The school is considering moving to a block schedule to create opportunities for more curriculum integration. New math and science curricula were recently adopted, along with new social studies texts.

Although staff spent time reviewing their curriculum for alignment with the EALRs, few changes were made. The entire curriculum has been coded to match the EALRs and entered into a database. The science department is working with the middle school to improve alignment of curriculum across grade levels. Most staff believe the literature-based English curriculum and traditional academic focus of math and science courses provide the necessary content students need.

Institute researchers and staff from the Senate Education Committee visited Sequim High School on November 7 and 8, 2000. We were able to interview the principal, assistant principal, dean of students, approximately 13 teachers and staff, 12 students, and 7 parents and community members. We also observed several classes. A special thank you to Principal Brian Pendleton and science teacher Dave Trapp for arranging the visit.

Staff have received training in the instructional strategies of six-trait writing and writing across the curriculum. Teachers are also increasing their use of rubrics to assess student work.

Administrator Perspectives

As a school, we perceive ourselves as college preparatory with a strong academic focus toward a four-year degree. But in reality, only 25 percent of our students go immediately into a four-year college. There are some concerns that we're trying to turn the school into a vocational one, but I think we're trying to emphasize the learning needs of the majority of our students.

We've spent a lot of time aligning our curriculum to the EALRs. I'm not sure teachers have had to change their delivery in any particular way, although they're using rubrics and doing six-trait writing. Every math teacher is incorporating some problems where students have to describe how they got their answers.

Teacher Perspectives

We had someone catalog the entire curriculum and code the EALRs next to it. But the EALRS are so vague, how would they change what we teach? The literature series we use has a lot of activities that dovetail with the EALRs. Math is a sequence of logical learning that is already complete. The classic subjects—literature, composition, mathematics—are the best way to teach critical thinking.

The focus of high school should be preparing thinking adults for a democracy, knowing how to use leisure time, having solid broad skills in reading, writing, and math. It should not be assisting students with finding employment. We're struggling a little right now between academics and vocational skills. Some faculty feel we're dumbing down the curriculum and becoming a vocational school. The fact of the matter is, the workforce demands skills regardless of whether someone has gone to college.

Student Perspectives

I haven't noticed any change in curriculum lately. I'm not sure I'd like to switch to a block schedule; the classes would be so long! Too many of the classes seem to be taught in a "college professor" format; I'd prefer to work more in groups. You would learn more, and it causes everyone to use what they learn and work in teams, like in the real world. Hands-on activities would make us more interested and motivated in school.

Parent Perspectives

The good thing is that education reform is driving the curriculum to cover the important areas. The EALRs tell the teachers what content all students need. There should be direction of the curriculum in this way so that you don't have huge gaps or overlap in what students are learning. What students learn should build logically and sequentially, and standards should help with that.

Impact of EALRs and WASL

Staff report little pressure to change either material or instruction as a result of the EALRs or WASL. However, they are concerned about the validity of the WASL, the time it takes to administer the test, and the lack of feedback from test results that could be used for instructional purposes. Sequim students scored above the statewide average on the WASL in all subjects except writing.

10th Grade WASL Results	Students Meeting Standard: Sequim High School		Students Meeting Standard: Statewide	
	1998–1999	1999–2000	1998–1999	1999–2000
Reading	58%	71%	51%	60%
Mathematics	37%	38%	33%	35%
Writing	42%	31%	41%	32%
Listening	80%	85%	73%	78%

In particular, staff are concerned about how to remediate students who do not pass the WASL. The district offers a summer school program for credit retrieval and is making more of an effort to identify and place students in appropriate math and English classes as freshmen. There is widespread concern that the high school curriculum risks becoming focused solely on WASL remediation at the expense of vocational and advanced courses.

Staff also believe that having the WASL in 10th grade, along with the Certificate of Mastery for those who meet the standards, implies that a high school education is complete at 10th grade. Many wonder what incentives would be necessary for students to take the test seriously.

Administrator Perspectives

We haven't been able to convince students to take the WASL seriously. If there aren't any consequences, it has an effect on the level of effort most students are willing to put into it. We feel quite strongly that passing the WASL should be a prerequisite for Running Start.

If the WASL and Benchmark II of the EALRs are "it" for high school, then what happens to 11th and 12th grade? Do we have to reconfigure ourselves into a remedial center? We have no idea of the answers to these questions, and they are quite troubling.

Teacher Perspectives

The WASL takes a lot of class time. The results are too broad and vague; there isn't enough feedback in specific subject areas to allow teachers to diagnose what the student isn't grasping. I'd like to see something more analytical and helpful come out of the results.

Remediation is a huge issue looming in the future. If the trend in WASL scores continue, what do we do? How does becoming a remedial school serve "all" students well?

If school is complete at the WASL, that takes two years of education and development away from a young person's background. We need to demand more of students, not less. Without the WASL appearing on their transcript or in a grade point, there's little incentive for students to do well. It's not enough for most students simply to tell them "you must pass." Students seem to resist being challenged; they're not committed to school. They just want to work.

Student Perspectives

It seemed like the WASL covered what we had learned in school. But I know it doesn't count; it's just another thing for us to do. We should get feedback on how we did, not just "you didn't pass." There should be classes at school for kids who don't pass.

Parent Perspectives

We hear a lot from teachers who are critical of the WASL. Personally, I don't like it much, but I think it will work out in the end. I'm not sure about having the WASL as a graduation requirement. If you're going to hold students accountable, you need to hold teachers accountable for providing the material they were supposed to teach. There's too much variation in quality, and then the kids would be the ones paying the price.

I have a huge concern about dropouts. If students are on a five- or six-year track to graduation, we'll end up as a huge remedial school. The state has a good intent, but what about special ed and ESL?

Options and Strategies to Make Learning More Relevant For Students

As part of an accreditation review in 2000, the high school conducted surveys of recent graduates. Among their top concerns were the lack of relevance in classes or homework assignments and the absence of "school spirit" or a feeling of belonging among students. These issues were more strongly cited by students who had enrolled in Running Start. Sequim is particularly concerned about the large number of students in Running Start and the impact of the missing students on the school's ability to offer advanced courses. Staff also believe the learning environment and overall atmosphere of the school are negatively affected by so many students leaving early to attend community college.

2000–2001 Implementation Stage	Experienced (3–4 years)	In Process (1–2 years)	Starting (First Year)	Actively Planning	No Definite Plans
Career Pathways				✓	
Culminating Project			✓		
Portfolios			✓		
Education Plan			✓		
Mentor Program			✓		
Service Learning					✓

The review has led Sequim to explore a number of options to enhance the high school learning experience, including portfolios, career pathways, educational planning, and culminating projects. Starting in 2000, Sequim began implementing the PACK: Portfolio of Achievement, Career, and Knowledge. The PACK will include entries to illustrate a student's competencies as Planner (educational plan, career interest surveys), Learner (learning styles, academic history, and test scores), Employee (attendance log, resumes, letters of recommendation), and Citizen (volunteer history, clubs, and activities).

Starting with this year's freshmen, students will create their portfolios on the computer. Students will present their portfolios each year, starting with brief summaries to their classmates and culminating for seniors with presentations to the community.

A 40-minute PACK period every two weeks allows students to meet with a teacher who will advise them for four years. A committee of teachers has been developing common lesson plans for PACK period, including such topics as goal setting, resume writing, introduction to EALRs, and career pathways.

PACK is still under development, and staff are working on how best to incorporate the various features they want to see included in the project. There is some disagreement whether PACK is the appropriate approach to take with students or the best utilization of instructional time and energy.

Sequim has also strengthened its vocational education program with horticulture, floral design, welding, and carpentry courses as well as a "Rabitat" rabbit-raising project. New computer labs allow expanded offerings in both technology certification and internet learning for credit retrieval and advanced placement. There is one College in the High School course offered in English, but the tuition fee of $320 makes it difficult to compete with Running Start.

Administrator Perspectives

Part of our response to education reform has been to create the portfolio and culminating project—to provide a focus throughout the four years of high school. I felt we needed something that would showcase a student's work and be a tool for ALL students. We want these kids to be goal-setters. It's fine to have a dream—dream big. But put plans into place that will help you achieve those dreams. Hopefully the various parts of PACK will encourage students to think in this fashion.

I hear some concern that PACK lowers academic standards and puts teachers in a role as career counselors. But the PACK period takes away 40 seconds per period per day from other courses. We want teachers to build a connection and rapport with the students they are responsible for as advisers.

We're trying to expand some of the learning opportunities like College in the High School, Internet courses, or vocational programs to encourage students to stay enrolled here, but Running Start is so popular we don't have the enrollment here to justify offering the classes.

Teacher Perspectives

The goal of PACK is that students will be more prepared after high school, having thought about their goals and their choices. But it's not true that nothing was being done before. PACK has too much vocational focus; that's not what we're here for. If the objectives aren't well thought out, it is destined to become trivial busywork for students. We're proceeding too fast; we should have taken longer to build a consensus about PACK's purpose and how it would work.

We don't know what this will look like in the end, but at least we're trying it. There really isn't anything in career education outside individual classes or departments. Ask a junior or senior what they want to do, what skills they have, what their interests are, and you get a blank look. The portfolio isn't just about providing career information, it's about communication skills and self-knowledge. A benefit that doesn't get appreciated enough is that PACK forces kids and adults to connect. We all have to take responsibility; it's not just the counselor's job.

Students claim they don't want to hurt their grade point average by taking Advanced Placement classes here at the high school. Running Start makes scheduling a real nightmare. It siphons off a lot of kids and limits our options. I'd like to see more internships, career pathways, and work-based learning. But they're very time-consuming to manage and many of the faculty believe they take away from academics.

Student Perspectives

PACK is to get you thinking about your future. They want you to have goals and write them down. It's good if you don't know what you want to do. It helps you prepare yourself and look into various options. The bottom line is, it depends on your PACK teacher. If the teacher thinks it's a waste of time, then the students aren't motivated to participate. It would be better if they took it more seriously. I'm a senior, and I don't know what I want to do. I wish we had done some of this PACK stuff earlier, but we just started this year.

It's too bad that advanced classes get cut because of Running Start. You end up being punished for not going. It takes away from the high school. But I want to be here because of the social environment and activities. I wish we had more opportunities for job shadow, internships, or career classes that would help us figure out what we want to do.

Parent Perspectives

The portfolio is a good way for students to organize themselves and provides them a way to sell themselves to work or to colleges. These type of things are good strategies to motivate and engage kids; it gives them a focus and direction. It shows the non-college bound that they too are successful in their interests and aspirations. There need to be alternative ways to recognize and applaud strengths.

We have a real brain drain to Running Start. Our kids are entitled to an education, but this option denies options to the students who choose to stay. That's not fair. Running Start works well for some kids, but it's a particular type of student who will benefit from that experience.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Future

Sequim High School is uncertain whether the state's emphasis on student competencies will positively affect student learning in the long run. They are experimenting with ways to get students engaged in learning, but suggest that the state's attention might be better focused on reducing class size, improving teacher preparation, or integrating curriculum.

Administrator Perspectives

If a student passes a test on a particular subject, does that mean they have mastered all of the material and content that they would learn during a course? That's what the notion of "competencies" implies. On the other hand, the notion of defining capabilities and demonstrating them can be very powerful if done well. I think the jury is still out on how this will all work.

Teacher Perspectives

We're fortunate in having 25 to 28 students in a class, but just think what you could accomplish with 15 to 18 students. That's where the real difference in student learning could happen, not in giving a test. We need to hire the best and brightest to become teachers. We need to get back to the basics: reading and writing. I think if anything should be encouraged by the legislature, it should be integration of curriculum. Students don't connect with subjects taught in isolation by the English teacher and the history teacher.

Student Perspectives

Teachers aren't always matched well with their subject areas. You can really tell the difference between a good teacher and one who doesn't know what they're talking about.

Parent Perspectives

The high school needs to provide a solid foundation for life-long learning and continue to serve all students. We can't neglect the high end and honors students, but we also have to be concerned about special ed and ESL students. The principal is really trying to change the school to reach all students, not just those who are going to college.

NOOKSACK VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Nooksack Valley High School serves students in northwestern Washington from the towns of Everson, Nooksack, Sumas, and surrounding rural areas in Whatcom County. It is a small school with 519 students in a district of approximately 1,860 students. In recent years, the district has grown in student enrollment by more than 65 percent as the previously agricultural areas have become bedroom communities to nearby Bellingham. Until two years ago, the school was a junior/senior high. A small alternative high school, Timber Ridge, serves about 45 middle and high school students from five local districts.

Nooksack Valley students take Running Start classes through Bellingham Technical College, Whatcom Community College, or Western Washington University. In 1999, the high school received a two-year grant from OSPI to further its work on educational pathways for 11th and 12th grades. The school district also received $1 million from the Gates Foundation to reinvent high school.

STUDENT DATA	NOOKSACK VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL	STATEWIDE (GRADES 9–12)
FALL 2000 ENROLLMENT (HEADCOUNT)	519	310,403
PERCENT MINORITY	17%	23%
PERCENT FREE & REDUCED LUNCH	29%	31%*

*Grades K–12

Strategies to Improve Student Learning

Nooksack Valley currently runs an A/B block schedule with eight 85-minute periods alternating every two days. This schedule allows for the extended learning periods offered by a block schedule, while still providing students the elective choices of a six-period day and the opportunity to study subjects for a full year. One exception is Algebra I, which 9th grade students take every day for an hour. The extra 20 minutes is Guided Study, where students can do homework, get additional assistance, or work on study skills. However, the A/B block schedule is somewhat complicated and requires students to be more focused and organized, which can be a challenge for younger students.

Part of the reason for the additional emphasis on algebra is the district's new graduation requirements. Starting with the class of 2004, students will have to pass Algebra I and geometry as well as Global Science to graduate. Global Science is a new integrated science course taken by all 9th graders.

Institute researchers visited Nooksack Valley High School on March 20 and 21, 2001. We were able to interview the principal, 12 teachers and staff, and 22 students. Thank you to Principal Mark Venn for arranging the visit.

Administrator Perspectives

Down the road I think we'll change the schedule. It's too much for 9th and 10th graders to focus on. It's a confusing schedule with a lot of transition. The Guided Study class helps by creating a homeroom-type atmosphere and allows the teachers to establish relationships with the students and their parents.

Teacher Perspectives

I think it's great that we're requiring Algebra I and Geometry to graduate. The skills really align well with the WASL. It's probably where the bar needs to be. The apprehension level has certainly gone up in algebra. If students failed at the semester, we put them back into pre-algebra to get their skills up. My feeling is that students who fail general math probably fail everything, so why not expose all of them to higher levels of math? It can't hurt. We might need to give 9th and 10th graders more structure. Students have to be awfully disciplined to succeed with eight different classes that rotate days.

Impact of EALRs and WASL

Nooksack Valley's WASL scores were above the state average for all subjects in 1998–1999 and increased in 1999–2000. Scores for reading, math, and listening showed significant increases.

10th Grade WASL Results	Students Meeting Standard: Nooksack Valley High School		Students Meeting Standard: Statewide	
	1998–1999	1999–2000	1998–1999	1999–2000
Reading	55%	75%	51%	60%
Mathematics	39%	54%	33%	35%
Writing	47%	50%	41%	32%
Listening	74%	97%	73%	78%

Staff have received in-service training instructional strategies such as six-trait writing and alternative assessments. The school's Leadership Committee is working to create additional time for professional development related to WASL preparation. Over the past few years, the district has convened workgroups of teachers at different grade levels (elementary, middle, and high school) and different subjects to review alignment of curriculum with the EALRs. Posters, bulletins, and newsletters serve as a continuing reminder to both staff and students of the importance of the standards and the WASL.

For remediation, some 9th graders are encouraged to enroll in an additional Guided Study period. The PAL (Personal Alternative Learning) program is offered both during school and in the summer for students who need to make up credits to graduate or who simply need additional basic skills. Nooksack Valley is examining each of these options for possible expansion to assist students who do not pass the WASL. In addition, the math department has recommended that students who do not pass the math portion of the WASL take an additional semester of math before being allowed to take the test a second time. Finally, the district has a new policy of requiring failing 8th grade students to attend summer school before promoting them, although it is not frequently applied.

Administrator Perspectives

Pretty much everything we do is associated with the EALRs. We see the WASL as a minimum only. The staff's approach to the test is key. We take it very seriously here and convey that to the students. One drawback of the WASL is that we don't get results back soon enough.

We're talking about how to differentiate instruction for struggling students, perhaps incorporate additional summer school. The goal is to create some sort of support system before they retake the test. Perhaps we could share remediation programs with others in the area. Mt. Baker, Lynden, and Nooksack could each develop particular strands of remediation. There will have to be modifications to the WASL and how tests are given. Research says not all students perform in the same way and therefore need different types of assessments to test their performance.

It would be a shame and a disappointment to lower the stakes at this stage. We hope it doesn't slip away. We have focused a lot of energy on the reforms. There have to be other indicators of success besides Certificate of Mastery, but don't let the challenges destroy the work that has already been done.

Teacher Perspectives

The EALRs have more of an impact on content and focus across subjects than on instructional style. In math we try to write more, explain the reasoning, and organize data. In English we're doing more and different types of writing: persuasive, speeches, expository. I think all classes are doing more writing: PE, science, even math. We know exactly what content we're supposed to be focused on, and we work on that all year long. I think the EALRs have really helped focus instruction. Even though teachers have different teaching styles, now we are focusing on teaching the same skills. I hope the legislature understands that the EALRs and the WASL take time to implement. In social studies we don't yet know what the state is going to do.

I think the WASL is a very reasonable test. It's a shame that schools would say kids could receive a diploma without being able to do the things on that test. On the other hand, there will be a population of students who will have a lot of trouble. To say those students are not worthwhile contributors to society is unfair and untrue. The WASL is not going to mean anything without consequences for students, and the high school diploma is the biggest consequence there is.

As the benchmarks become more real, we won't be able to ignore the reality of remediation. There isn't going to be a "one size fits all" approach that will work. We've talked about alternative types of diplomas or incentives we could offer for those who don't pass. We're looking to the state to make suggestions on this, too. I have never seen a public high school with a real remediation program. We push failing students back into class or come up with some way to get them credit for classes they've failed. Remediation is a personnel issue. Every time you add something, you have to take something away.

Student Perspectives

I thought the WASL was a pretty good assessment of what we know. It was thoughtful but too long. I don't know if it's a good test for everyone; some people are more hands-on. It would be helpful if teachers made an effort to work out what's on the test. They need to prepare students a lot more before making it a requirement.

I took it seriously, but I knew it didn't really count. I cared because the score got sent home to my parents. I think people would try more if they knew they wouldn't get to graduate if they didn't pass, but then they'd stress out about it. I don't think it's a good idea to require it for graduation. If kids are taking low levels of math and stuff and getting by just to graduate, they're not getting the skills they need, and this test would have serious consequences for them. They'd be stuck because they didn't take the right classes.

Options and Strategies to Make Learning More Relevant For Students

Nooksack Valley is in the early stages of implementing a series of activities, including pathways, portfolios, education plans, senior projects, and student profiles.

2000–2001 Implementation Stage	Experienced (3–4 years)	In Process (1–2 years)	Starting (First Year)	Actively Planning	No Definite Plans
Career Pathways		✓			
Culminating Project	✓				
Portfolios		✓			
Education Plan		✓			
Mentor Program				✓	
Service Learning		✓			

The high school course catalog is organized into five career pathways, and 8th grade students receive information about pathways before they enroll. In 1999, all 9th grade students enrolled in a Focus 9 class where students explored careers in their pathway, learned about job applications, resumes, and workplace skills, and participated in an informational interview. In 2000, the class was moved to 10th grade and is now Focus 10. Freshmen are instead required to take one vocational exploration class and keyboarding. Much of the introductory material from Focus 9 is now included in these two courses, and Focus 10 is oriented more toward careers, including a career research paper and presentation at the end of the year.

In the future, staff want to improve the structure and content of these courses, which are currently in transition, as well as create additional pathway-specific electives for 11th and 12th grades. The small size of the school limits the number of new electives; staff are exploring whether additional independent learning opportunities can be offered but still be managed to ensure they provide students with essential skills. The pathways coordinator is experimenting with the Teacher Assistant (TA) class this year by requiring a performance evaluation (using a Learning Employability Profile), reflection papers, and increased accountability from all TAs.

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As part of the Focus 10 and vocational exploration classes, students put together a personal portfolio that is a collection of student work and a record of activities. One of the items is a 13-year education plan, which is also used by counselors to help students schedule courses. Use of the portfolios beyond these classes is currently limited. Nooksack Valley intends to incorporate the portfolios into the senior project over the next few years but is still working on the details.

The senior project became a graduation requirement in 2000, although some students completed them voluntarily beginning in 1994. The project includes a proposal, academic and action research, community mentor, reflection paper, and community presentation. The district helps students complete the project by having them do research and make a presentation every two years (at increasing levels of sophistication) starting in 6th grade.

The student profile is another work in progress. While Nooksack Valley has created a description of what it expects all graduates to be (Educated, Productive, and Responsible Citizens), the school is still defining how these attributes will be assessed. A plan to introduce an advisory period in 2000, where each student is supported by a teacher/mentor for four years, was delayed to give staff more time to determine how this time would be used to connect the other programs. Finally, the junior class spends the week of the WASL test doing community service.

Administrator Perspectives

If you look at the surface, Nooksack Valley High School looks great. We match up with the best high schools in the state for the top 30 percent of our students. They're wonderfully successful in college. But I don't think we're doing enough for the rest of the students. It's not a matter of effort—we're all working very hard—but we need to find ways to do things differently. The 5 P's (pathways, portfolios, plans, project, and profile) are our way of reaching all students. We're still working on the pieces.

Teacher Perspectives

I think we have a ways to go for pathways to impact or be a presence in other classes. In some ways, I'm not sure they should be. But I do think students need to have a sense of guidance and motivation for where they're headed. Which pathway a student chooses is not as important as thinking about how to accomplish what they want to do. Overall, I think kids are asking better questions and are more aware of their choices. Kids need exposure to things. They don't realize what's out there. We're still experimenting with the Focus classes. We need to work on the programming.

The portfolio and pathways projects have a lot going for them where kids can access and see their own growth, but it's not an understood part of the school culture yet. We don't know exactly how to get there. The student profile, for example, is still "out there." Most of the faculty probably wouldn't know exactly what it is. We're trying to tie school in with life for the students, but some teachers feel like it's all too much. PR is an issue with these efforts; you don't just dump something new on people at a staff meeting.

Senior projects have the potential to change the culture of the school. We really hold those seniors' feet to the fire. The quality of the product varies, but they have to complete it and meet deadlines. It gets them focused on the outside world, on the community at large. The same students who might otherwise be considered low achieving are given the opportunity to shine, to be confident about what they're good at. Oddly, the students who struggle the most are the ones who get A's because they just comply with what the teacher tells them to do. Here they have to take initiative and create something. I think the project serves 60 to 70 percent of the students, but not those who are accelerated. They would be better off taking a challenging academic subject.

Student Perspectives

Focus class helps people who don't know what they want to do, but otherwise I'm not sure what the point was. I think it's a good idea to let kids see options and the different types of careers that are out there. It's a good idea, but when you're in 9th or 10th grade, you're not ready to be thinking about careers yet. We worked on our portfolios in the Focus class, but after that they weren't really emphasized.

For senior project, you're supposed to pick something that you want to do. Some people rebuilt tractors; you could do an internship; I'm doing a research paper. For it to be worthwhile, you need to pick the right topic. I'm a procrastinator, so it's really hard for me to do it. It's not about "if you finish," it's the process you go through. Seniors have pretty easy classes; I think it's a good idea to give them something important to do in their last year.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Future

The principal, teachers, and staff at Nooksack Valley are excited about the opportunity provided by the Gates Foundation grant to explore, discuss, and propose potentially visionary changes to the traditional structure of high school. During 2000–2001, the Leadership Committee is collecting background data about the school and reading research on national reforms in preparation for 2001–2002, where all staff will be involved in planning. At this point, the staff are most interested in exploring new ways to use time: for teaching, planning, learning, and communicating. They also want to experiment with individualized learning in 11th and 12th grades to create more options for students.

Administrator Perspectives

The education system is at a crossroads. We have to try to change to meet the needs of ALL students. We need to change our belief system and understand that all students can work and meet the standards.

Schools have to have a focus. If you ask around here what the focus of the school is, you'll get four or five different answers. None of them will be bad. I think we stand for a lot, but not everything we do is based on a single philosophy that drives us and guides us. The Gates grant is causing us to look very hard at why we need wholesale change in education. Down the road, I think we'll see a 9th and 10th grade structure that's very different from what 11th and 12th grades look like.

Teacher Perspectives

I think we need to change because we're training our kids for two decades back. A lot of the present design of high school does not enhance kids as communicators. We've had a focus on individuals, but now we need to teach teamwork. Much of the promise of technology is unfulfilled. More resources need to go into student-centered programs. We get mixed messages from the state, from parents. What IS our common focus within the school?

We recognize as a school that we've got an opportunity to do things differently. We're going to spend a lot of time reinventing school next year. We need creative ways to address teaching styles, learning styles, time, schedules. We have a chance to take risks and try something different, but in a planned and thoughtful way. I want to see schools be innovative, but it's hard. The traditional approach to high school may need to be reconsidered. It might feel overwhelming sometimes, but it's exciting. Helping staff to adapt to change and impart the need for change is the greatest challenge. It takes time to be on a task force; it takes time for training and communication. We're all concerned about burnout.

Student Perspectives

It would be better if our school really started pushing people to do something after high school rather than making it easy for them to graduate. A lot of kids are going to need math and science and problem-solving skills when they leave here, and they need to be getting those while they're in school.

It would be good if we had more different kinds of programs for different people to choose—but, if we had to choose between variety and the small size of the school, I would choose the small size.

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LAKE ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Lake Roosevelt High School is in the small rural community of Coulee Dam in eastern Washington. Located on the Colville Indian Reservation, 49 percent of the high school's 299 students are Native American. An alternative high school serving about 50 students is located in the community center along with a satellite campus of Big Bend Community College. The community college offers both in-class instruction and distance learning classes using the K–20 telecommunications network. In the early 1990s, Lake Roosevelt received one of the original state grants to implement School-to-Work and now frequently mentors other school districts on strategies to incorporate applied learning and career education across the curriculum.

STUDENT DATA	LAKE ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL	STATEWIDE (GRADES 9–12)
FALL 2000 ENROLLMENT (HEADCOUNT)	299	310,403
PERCENT MINORITY	53%	23%
PERCENT FREE & REDUCED LUNCH	25%	31%*

*Grades K–12

For 2000–2001, Lake Roosevelt High School had 23 certificated staff, including administrators, and 17 classified and support staff. The principal will be retiring at the end of this school year.

Strategies to Improve Student Learning

As a result of its focus on School-to-Work transition, Lake Roosevelt has attempted both to increase the vocational content of traditionally academic subjects as well as raise the academic rigor of vocational classes. Some integration of subjects occurs. For example, freshman English and keyboarding are combined in a two-hour block called Applied Communications. Honors students take an integrated block of history and English. With this structure, teachers collaborate on classes, and students can focus on one activity with one teacher for longer periods.

Lake Roosevelt divides most academic courses into honors and non-honors tracks beginning in 9th grade, in part because of high truancy levels. Tracking students allows the school to provide individualized assistance to those who are falling behind while providing other students an opportunity to learn with fewer disruptions.

Institute researchers visited Lake Roosevelt High School on March 6 and 7, 2001. We interviewed the principal, 12 teachers and staff, approximately 35 students, and 14 parents and community members at a specially convened evening meeting. Thank you to Principal Rich Graham for arranging the visit and to the parents, community members, teachers, and staff who made time to speak with us.

Lake Roosevelt is currently emphasizing writing skills. All staff in the district have been trained in such instructional strategies as six-trait writing and writing across the curriculum. Teachers in every class, including physical education, are expected to have students write using different prompts and writing styles. Last year the staff gave special emphasis to technical writing.

Administrator Perspectives

I'd be the first to admit that we track students. The honors students go on to be very successful. But at the same time, we put a lot of energy into the low-achieving students. It's not unusual for students to be gone for weeks and then come back. How can they keep up in the regular class? We need to give the committed students an opportunity to learn without so many disruptions.

We're very focused on reading and writing. Just last week I asked each of the teachers to give me an example of their writing assignments for every class.

Teacher Perspectives

We've been trying to increase the academics offered in vocational classes and vice versa. We encourage teachers to use applied examples in all of their academic classes. Sometimes it can be a challenge to get teachers to think about core skills and use different tools to make their classes seem relevant to kids, but once you get comfortable with it, you can try all different types of activities.

Our advice is to make the various activities a part of the academic curriculum. Resumes, letters of complaints, memos, can all be taught in English. Students need to know how to read manuals, instructions, data. They need to know why they're learning algebra and what principles from science they will continue to use throughout their lifetimes.

Student Perspectives

We seem to be doing a lot more writing. They've adopted a new format for writing papers, and they score on rubrics. It's good preparation for college or work because we do technical writing. I think in math and science they need to push us more and do more activities beyond what's in the book. We get to do group work in junior honors class, but I wish there was more. You get more of a perspective on different ways of working and different answers to problems.

The honors classes are pretty good. Actually, they're not that much more difficult than the regular classes, but you can accomplish more because the students are motivated. We do our work, and the teacher isn't taking time away to deal with discipline issues. We're not interrupted by disruptions from students who don't care.

Parent Perspectives

We have a split in this school: if students aren't college bound, then they don't take honors English or other honors classes. But we're also doing a better job creating learning opportunities at the school for the non-college bound. Still, the school needs to emphasize that kids need to take math; they need to be able to read and write. No job exists these days where they're not required to have skills.

Impact of EALRs and WASL

Lake Roosevelt's WASL scores showed substantial improvement in reading and listening, while the math and writing scores decreased between 1998–1999 and 1999–2000.

Teachers are concerned by the loss of teaching time due to the time required to administer the WASL and would like to receive earlier and more comprehensive feedback on results to assist in adjusting instruction.

10th Grade WASL Results	Students Meeting Standard: Lake Roosevelt High School		Students Meeting Standard: Statewide	
	1998–1999	1999–2000	1998–1999	1999–2000
Reading	39%	51%	51%	60%
Mathematics	22%	21%	33%	35%
Writing	41%	16%	41%	32%
Listening	67%	75%	73%	78%

The school district has taken a district-wide approach to aligning curriculum across grade levels to the EALRs. In addition, Lake Roosevelt has initiated a curriculum-mapping project to document how lesson plans and instruction align with the EALRs. The school hopes to use mapping as a tool for further alignment both within the high school curriculum and across grade levels. Vocational teachers are waiting for new program and skills standards in vocational education to ensure these are integrated into classes along with the EALRs. As a result of the EALRs, Lake Roosevelt is now offering integrated science in 9th and 10th grades.

To assist students who are struggling, Lake Roosevelt has an academic recovery lab that uses the same self-paced, computer-assisted curriculum as the nearby alternative high school. Staff are considering expanding this model to address students who may need remediation for the WASL but realize this strategy alone may not provide sufficient assistance. They are particularly concerned about the short period of time available to remediate students who enter high school without basic skills. For students who are the first in their families to go to college, Big Bend Community College offers a tutoring and mentoring program after school and during the summer.

Administrator Perspectives

For the first few years, the EALRs and education reform actually stalled us at what we were doing. We were already well on our way to making some changes, such as career pathways, and we had to flounder around while the EALRs were being developed and changed to see what would happen to the curriculum. We're still not getting clear guidance and direction from the state in science and social studies. We also don't get very much feedback from the test so we can evaluate each student's performance to see what's going on with their learning.

Our biggest challenge is that students come to high school not prepared to do the work. Our philosophy is you can't return kids to the same class for remediation. There's a reason they failed the first time. There needs to be another way, and this has big implications for the future. I foresee having to put our best staff into remediation. That's a real paradigm shift for the top teachers to have to take the toughest students. It hasn't happened yet, but it will.

Teacher Perspectives

I think we're all taking the EALRs and WASL pretty seriously. No one here thinks it's just going away. Alignment of curriculum is a really big effort, and the district takes it quite seriously. But alignment alone can be a big joke. Curriculum mapping requires retrospective reality rather than prospective wishful thinking. It's not enough to have alignment as your goal, you have to actually deliver. I think the standards are just great, but there need to be alternative ways of testing different learning styles and different kids. I think the state is on the right track with standards and goals.

The biggest challenge is getting students to take the test seriously, along with their parents. They don't understand the implications of poor performance. I'm afraid students will just drop out. We don't have any way for students to relearn material; that's true throughout the school system, not just in high school. I don't see remediation going on at the lower levels in school. Then the students come here, and we end up taking the blame for their low test scores.

Student Perspectives

We have posters in our English classroom about the state goals. Our teacher always mentions when things are going to be on the WASL. I think we're writing a lot more papers and having to explain our work in math. Teachers do a lot of different things, like trying to get us to understand the reasons and not just the answers. I didn't like the WASL. It was too hard. It seemed like some of the stuff we hadn't learned before. If half the class takes it and doesn't pass, then something's wrong. I thought teaching to the test was supposed to be a bad thing.

Kids don't take the WASL that seriously. It's not on a grade or anything. If they did make it a graduation requirement, that would probably make us try harder. If employers asked for it, that would be something. I think half the reason this school is getting bad scores is that it doesn't matter. I think our students are smarter than their scores show. It's a good idea to have some sort of standards. Too many students get to pass without doing anything. Athletes are motivated because they have to be passing all of their classes in order to play sports, and the coaches watch out for them. But for other students, there's no demand for them to pass.

Parent Perspectives

For my daughter, the WASL doesn't really mean much. My kids say "What does it have to do with anything?" If it was seen as helping them get into a school or a job, then they would see how they could benefit. Some students are quite competitive, and they want to see how they fared. If teaching to the test includes all the stuff they're supposed to know, it's okay with me.

We have a lot of students who are not ready to sit in a traditional school. Lake Roosevelt achievement is fairly low compared to other school districts. Our students may start out at a disadvantage; what modifications are made for that? What are the consequences going to be for the school district? What about money for remediation?

Options and Strategies to Make Learning More Relevant For Students

School-to-Work strategies have been the primary driver for reforms at Lake Roosevelt. Over time, career pathways and career exploration have been integrated into all classes and the school culture. This has occurred primarily through a student portfolio (Personally Responsible for Excellence Portfolio, or PREP) and a culminating senior project. Career

themes are also emphasized through the variety of vocational classes available, the integration of vocational skills into regular classes, and an emphasis on work experience opportunities.

2000–2001 Implementation Stage	Experienced (3–4 years)	In Process (1–2 years)	Starting (First Year)	Actively Planning	No Definite Plans
Career Pathways	✓				
Culminating Project	✓				
Portfolios	✓				
Education Plan	✓				
Mentor Program					✓
Service Learning	✓				

Starting in middle school, the guidance counselor and pathways coordinator talk to students and parents to prepare them for high school registration when students are asked to choose a career pathway. As a small school, Lake Roosevelt has a limited number of electives tailored to different pathways, but students are still encouraged to choose their courses intentionally rather than randomly. Parents are required to attend student registration to help students make choices and to increase parent awareness and involvement.

All students maintain a PREP beginning in 9th grade. Students are free to put anything they wish in the portfolio, and teachers or parents may not look at it without the student's permission. The intent is for students to build a sense of ownership and responsibility for their PREP. However, teachers mark exemplary work and make suggestions to students to include certain materials. Students present their PREP as part of their senior project, and this knowledge (along with advice from other students) encourages students to take the PREP seriously.

The senior project is called Oral Boards and includes a research paper and a presentation of the paper and the PREP to a panel of community members. Students have time to work on their projects during Senior English and Current World Problems. Seniors are also required to complete 40 hours of community service.

In 1999, teachers began assessing each student based on a list of work competencies, such as communication, teamwork, attendance, and follow-through. The idea is for students to understand how they will be evaluated as employees. Most students participate in a job shadow each year, and the school makes a special effort to place students in jobs throughout the region because the community offers limited diversity in occupations.

Lake Roosevelt and Big Bend Community College have developed a collaborative approach to offering students access to Running Start. The high school supports expanded options for students, and the college makes a special effort to schedule classes so most students can remain involved in the high school.

Administrator Perspectives

The teachers looked at our high school graduates and weren't pleased with what they saw. Seniors were getting early releases and taking easy classes, just coasting. Too many walked across the stage at graduation having no idea why they had come to school and what they were going to do next.

Parents must come in to register their students. This way we make sure that the parent asks the student at least once, "What are you going to do when you leave my house?" We then encourage the students to select classes based on their pathway. In reality, there isn't a lot of variation because we don't have many electives to offer. We haven't heard any objection from parents that this is too "vocational" because all levels of professions are in each pathway.

The PREP is a huge motivator for students. They know they have to complete it, along with a term paper, and present them to the community. It's a big deal. Oral Boards is an exciting, nervous time around here. We expect a lot from seniors. We really keep them on track.

Teacher Perspectives

The strongest thing we have for middle- and low-achieving students is pathways. Even if they're not going after a professional career, it gives students the feeling that they have options. It engages kids so they pursue their interests. We're actually seeing a stronger interest in vocational and college-level training. They tend to limit themselves only to the job opportunities they see in this town. We want them to have the confidence that they can go beyond what they see.

As teachers, we each incorporate career education into all our classes. There are exercises and assignments in different classes that revolve around researching a career or what skills you might need to have in a career. We've been at this since 1993, and it's the only thing most of us know. It's part of what we DO. Other schools miss the point of making pathways matter to kids.

One reason we chose the pathways was the seniors—we were disappointed to see them loaf through their last semester. Now you see them a week before graduation, and they're all stressed out about their papers and their Oral Boards. It's good—it challenges them. The PREP is a way of making students responsible for their own work. Some students procrastinate, but not many. They know they're going to have to stand up in front the community, and that's a big motivator.

Student Perspectives

For Oral Boards, you get interviewed by the community, and you have to tie it all together. I'm excited and nervous about the Oral Boards. I think it's cool. I don't have that much experience with talking to people or making presentations. Everyone has to learn that skill. The Oral Boards are like a job interview. You're supposed to act professional. You're supposed to ask yourself a lot of questions as you mature, and the senior projects help you answer those questions.

The PREP has everything in it that's related to what you want to do after high school. It's work that you're proud of, that shows improvement over time. I think it's useful. I like having control over the portfolio. I procrastinated about it, but then as you get older, you begin to take it more seriously. Your sisters and brothers tell you it's worthwhile.

Your pathway choice isn't fixed in stone. It's a direction, and it doesn't really matter which one you pick. The point is that it gives you some guidance. It helps you organize your thoughts. The job shadows really help. They try to get you into whatever job you might be interested in. Some went to the FBI or the radio station in Spokane. It's fun—you get to see what's out there.

Parent Perspectives

I think this school is doing an excellent job with the pathways. It's motivational for both college and non-college bound. The experiences kids have had with job shadows have been outstanding. We have had students job shadow us where I work. It's been good not only for the kids but for us, too.

Oral Boards are great. Kids have to stand in front of people from the community who they do not know. They have to put a whole lot of effort into their senior project with the research paper, the PREP file, and interviews. A lot of the people in our community are older, they don't know what's happening in our schools. I've heard so many comments about how impressed they are with the kids after they sit on an Oral Board. Every single student who does it has a positive reaction.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Future

Lake Roosevelt, like many schools, is concerned about how the state will support remediation for the WASL. They also face challenges in their community, such as an aging facility, limited tax base for levies, and low parent involvement in the high school.

Administrator Perspectives

When the Certificate of Mastery comes to pass, there's going to have to be additional funding for remediation. We'll have to create classes to remediate and prepare for the WASL. We can't just doom students to re-taking the same classes over and over. It will have to be something extra. Ultimately, there will have to be a decision about retention in lower grades. It can't all come down to the 10th grade WASL if students aren't remediated at all levels throughout their school careers.

Teacher Perspectives

Parent education is a huge issue—we're not doing a good job in getting the message out to parents about education reform, especially about the WASL. There are social and cultural issues involved with getting parents more involved in their students' education. Statewide, there needs to be more parent education about education reform and about the importance of education.

Really, our challenge is our facility. It's an old building, there's no lunchroom. But we have no levy base to speak of—it's all government-owned land, and there's no industry or economy to speak of beyond that. We can pass operating levies, but even at the low amount of money we get, the rate is quite high.

Student Perspectives

The teachers here are very willing to help after school. They're very dedicated. They'll even volunteer to come in before school to help you with your work. We have a lot of teachers who care about us. But we need a new building. We need a cafeteria. My dad graduated from this building, and it hasn't changed since then!

Parent Perspectives

The only thing that's holding us back is funding. We have a very limited tax base here. Our school has a large percentage of free and reduced lunch students, and it doesn't seem fair to be compared to other school districts. The state needs to give schools that aren't doing well time to adjust. We can't do it overnight.